

Chapter Eleven

Experiences from Slovenia

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Overall National Context, Facts, and Legal Basis

Overall Context: Facts (and the Most Important Numbers)

From the point of view of most migrants, Slovenia is a transition state. This means that most UAMS leave the country relatively quickly and follow their path to the countries of Western and Northern Europe. Some evidence in numbers: 679 UAMS in the period 2002–2016, 388 UAM applicants for asylum in 2017, and 555 in 2018. Around 75% of UAMS left Slovenia on their own, which means that international protection procedures initiated in all those cases were suspended (Žakelj and Lenarčič, 2017; Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve Republike Slovenije, 2019). The quantitative dimension of the challenge is thus small for Slovenia. The country is in the situation of being able to test policy and intervention alternatives on a small scale and to thoroughly study the efforts in larger countries. The small community of migration experts is in close contact, backed up by partly extraordinarily strong and influential philanthropic organisations and a high level of access of practitioners and expert scholars to political decision makers.

Legal Basis or National Legislation, Relevant for Migrants

When UAMS arrive in Slovenia, they have two options:

1. They remain in the country as illegal migrants without status and are resident in the Aliens Centre until they return to their country of origin.
2. They submit applications for international protection – which is the practice in most cases (they receive refugee status or subsidiary protection for a defined period).

An unaccompanied minor is a third-country national or a person without residence under the age of 18, being in the territory of Slovenia

without parents or legal representatives. Special protection for unaccompanied minors is already provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires States to cooperate with the United Nations and organisations in the protection and assistance of these children in finding parents or other family members for the purpose of family reunification. If parents or other family members cannot be found, the child shall, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, enjoy the same protection as any other child who, for whatever reason, is permanently or temporarily deprived of his or her family environment. Currently, most unaccompanied children are accommodated in Postojna student dormitory. Unaccompanied minors may also be accommodated in the Aliens centre (illegal migrants) or with a foster family, in accordance with the national law.

Unaccompanied minors have special rights guaranteed in the procedures of recognition of international protection, as they are considered as vulnerable persons with special needs. The state authorities have to establish the identity of an unaccompanied minor as soon as possible, and start the process of searching for his parents or other relatives. Prior to the commencement of the proceedings, the unaccompanied minor shall be assigned a legal representative. The unaccompanied minor shall submit a request for protection in person in the presence of the appointed legal representative. For an unaccompanied minor with recognised international protection, the social work centre immediately appoints a guardian and carries out the procedure regarding their accommodation. Unaccompanied minors residing illegally in the Republic of Slovenia: the state may issue a decision on the return of a minor (or on admission to a third country) only if a guardian for special cases has been appointed (*Otrok je najprej otrok*, 2017)

The Strategy of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia with regard to migrations 2019 (Vlada Republike Slovenije, 2019) stressed several recommendations that support social inclusion of UAMS in transition to adulthood:

- *Need for a cultural mediator.* A system of intercultural mediators should be developed, who would assist in the communication between migrants and various services (health, social care, schools, etc.) and between migrants and the majority population.
- *Specific training for professionals.* Regular and compulsory educa-

tion should be introduced for all who are in regular contact with UAMS. All employees in various services that are in contact with migrants (administrative units, centres for social work, schools, kindergartens and other educational organisations, health centres, hospitals, police, etc.) should be provided with specific training in the field of development of intercultural competences, and special knowledge (identification of vulnerable migrants, identification of various symptoms, victims of violence, torture, trafficking in human beings, etc.) should be acquired.

- *Housing groups and foster families for UAMS.* Housing groups with 24/7 professional presence that would prepare migrants for independent living shall be established. As foster care may be the most appropriate form of accommodation for young unaccompanied minors, additional training for existing foster carers should be provided and new potential foster carers should be attracted through awareness raising and promotion activities. Foster carers shall be provided with needed support, and monitoring/control of foster care should be introduced.
- *Attention to children's victims of trafficking.* Particular attention should be paid to children who are victims of trafficking in human beings and they should receive special treatment.
- *Paying attention to transition to adulthood.* When designing systemic solutions, it is also necessary to plan gradual transition of unaccompanied adolescents to adulthood and to provide them with adequate care. After attaining the age of majority, minors who turn out to be not yet sufficiently independent should be provided with further assistance in a tailored form to facilitate their transition from full care to autonomy and independent living.

The CISO TRA project with its activities will help to realise objectives of the strategy.

Minor Migrants in Transition to Adulthood: Situation and Challenges

With the age of 18, UAMS lose the minor migrant rights to the following:

- legal representative;
- accommodation: from the housing unit for minors, they are moved in the adult section; those living in a Student residence may stay

there until the end of the 'current' school year, even if they have already reached the age of 18;

- status: if a minor was attributed refugee status, it is maintained, in the case of subsidiary protection, it terminates.

UAMS who live in Student Residence in Postojna are being prepared for transition to adulthood through different (daily) activities, e.g., assistance in searching for a job, preparation of food by minors themselves, responsible shopping, communication with doctors, learning about administrative procedures, filling in forms/documentations, taking responsibilities for their actions, etc.

However, no systematic initiatives and projects have been prepared for transition of UAMS into adulthood; some progress can be seen in the last period – e.g., transition into adulthood has been discussed within the government working group.

Below, reflections from discussions with UAMS and young adults, held in Student Residence of Postojna are presented (discussion was held in September 2019).

Group of young migrants was very mixed: nine minors, five 18 or more; around half of them with status, and around half waiting for the status/applicants; among them only one girl. Some of them had been staying in Slovenia for 4 years already; some arrived in Slovenia 1 month ago. Most of them were attending Primary school in Postojna (at adult Education centre), some were in secondary school, some of them also worked (e.g., in a restaurant). Some of them had been travelling to Slovenia for 4 months, some even for a few years (and they also worked during their trip, to earn for the travel).

We asked the following questions: Describe your reception and accommodation in Slovenia. What was the most difficult for you? What were your worries/fears?

- The most difficult for us was that we did not know Slovenian language;
- It was exceedingly difficult to wait for the status;
- If you are without status, you get only 18 EUR per month and this is nothing.

Answers we received to the question: Are you satisfied with the support offered?

- They like everything, everything is fine;
- The people, the country, they like their stay in the residence. Those that are not in the residence anymore have stressed: for me it is better, that I live on my own, I don't have to worry about getting back to residence in time.

Answers we received to the question: What are your plans?

- I want to finish school, and then I want to work: some would like to become mechanics, some work in health services, etc.

Key Coordinating Actors

Actors (the Most Important in the Country)

There are many organisations in Slovenia that help migrants and refugees. In principle, they are divided into governmental organisations, public organisations, and non-governmental organisations. Among the non-governmental organisations, there are domestic and foreign organisations.

Governmental organisations – State Actors:

- The Government of Republic Slovenia;
- The Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for the Care and Integration of Migrants;
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs;
- The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities;
- The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Ministry of Health.

Public organisations:

- Educational institutions (elementary education, secondary education, higher education, language schools.), student residences, adult education;
- Health care institutions;
- Labour market organisations;
- Social work centres;

NGOS (beside the listed, many other NGOs work with migrants):

- Slovene Philanthropy (main areas covered: humanitarian help, legal support, psycho-social support, informing refugees, interpreters, monitoring situation – respect of human rights, advocacy and communication with authority, cultural mediation, educational help/learning assistance and general help with integration and personal development, etc.);
- Association ‘Odnos’ (main area covered: humanitarian help, psycho-social support, informing refugees, helping refugees in finding appropriate accommodation solutions, interpreters, advocacy and communication with authority, cultural mediation, educational help/learning assistance and general help with integration and personal development, etc.);
- Legal Information Centre (dedicated to protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, especially unaccompanied young people);
- Amnesty International (informs the public about the state of respect of human rights in Slovenia, and often includes an assessment of the living conditions of refugees in its reports);
- Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth (area covered: humanitarian help, psycho-social support, educational help/learning assistance and in general help with integration and personal development, etc.)
- International Organisation for Migrations MOM-IOM (informing refugees);
- Peace Institute (advocacy and communication with authority);
- Sports institutes, youth centres (leisure activities);
- Caritas (main areas covered: humanitarian help, legal support, psycho-social support, informing refugees, interpreters, advocacy, and communication with authority ...);
- Red Cross (main areas covered: informing refugees, interpreters, advocacy, and communication with authority, etc.);
- UNICEF (main areas covered: psycho-social support, monitoring situation-respect of human rights, advocacy, and communication with authority, etc.);
- Institute Circle (main areas covered: psycho-social support, interpreters, religious care/support, etc.);
- Non-Violent Communication Society;
- Institute for African studies (main areas covered: legal support, psycho-social support, informing refugees, interpreters, monitor-

- ing situation-respect of human rights, advocacy and communication with authority, cultural mediation . . .);
- Association for Development of Volunteering Work Novo mesto (main areas covered: legal support, psycho-social support, interpreters, cultural mediation, educational help/learning assistance and in general help with integration and personal development, etc.);
 - Humanitarian charity organisation UP Jesenice (main areas covered: humanitarian help, legal support, psycho-social support, interpreters, monitoring situation-respect of human rights, religious care/support, cultural mediation, etc.);
 - Humanitarian association ADRA Slovenia (main areas covered: humanitarian help, informing refugees, religious care/support, etc.);
 - Jesuit Refugee Service Slovenia (psycho-social support, informing refugees, religious care/support, etc.);
 - Association Trigger/Povod (main areas covered: psychosocial support, interpreters, monitoring situation-respect of human rights, cultural mediation, etc.);
 - Association Humanitas (monitoring situation-respect of human rights, cultural mediation);
 - individual volunteers and other NGOs.

Coordination of NGOs. The work of non-governmental organisations is coordinated by the Platform 'Sloga'. Sloga brings together NGOs and other non-profit organisations with the aim of strengthening their cooperation in the field of global learning and humanitarian aid. The platform informs about current events, emphasises the importance of development and humanitarian cooperation, and encourages cooperation with political decision-makers.

Cooperation and Coordination among Different Actors

The Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for the Care and Integration of Migrants, governmental organisation established on 1 June 2017 (office responsible for integration of refugees), is the main institution, responsible for integration of migrants. Further on, its main tasks and its cooperation with different actors are described.

Main tasks of the office are:

- preparation of standards and guidelines for work in the field of integration,
- participation in preparing legislation in the field of international protection,
- preparation of integration plans for persons with recognised international protection and monitoring of their implementation,
- provision of accommodation capacities and operation of integration houses and branches (accommodation of unaccompanied minor migrants is coordinated by the Office in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, together with the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport),
- preparation of internal instructions for the operation of integration houses and its branches,
- conducting procedures and organising the accommodation of persons with recognised international protection and performing other tasks related to the accommodation of persons with recognised international protection,
- programmes for integration of migrants into Slovenian society for persons with recognised status (integration plan),
- coordination of the work of non-governmental, international, and other organisations in the field of integration of migrants,
- participation in the inter-ministerial implementation of integration measures from the work areas of individual ministries,
- performing tasks related to the implementation of assistance programs for the integration of persons with recognised international protection,
- advising persons with recognised international protection.

In carrying out its tasks, the Office works closely with the European Migration Network (EMN), the European Asylum Support Agency (EASO) and the National Contact Point European Integration Network (EIN). In performing its regular tasks, the Office cooperates with state bodies, local communities, centres for social work, and with non-governmental organisations (international and domestic).

In addition to the Office, the Ministry of Labour, the Employment Service, public institutes (learning Slovene language), the Ministry of Education, the Centre for Social Work and other public entities con-

tribute to the success of integration through their cooperation. Main facts about coordination among different actors, and challenges:

- Insufficient connection between public sector institutions – these are mainly focused on the part of the integration process entrusted to them.
- The challenge is cooperation between public authorities and non-governmental organisations. In relation to the state, civil society is not considered a serious partner in the provision of services. The role of civil society is thus reduced; it is perceived only as a complement to the public sector. At the same time, the general impression is that refugees depend on the help and support of non-governmental organisations for too long.
- The operation of inter-sectoral working group for monitoring activities in the field of migration is a positive approach (established in 2018).

Key Competencies Needed for Professionals, Ensuring the Acquisition of Needed Competencies

Theoretical expert knowledge ‘common’ to different types of professionals who work with UAMS/young adults, main areas:

- Legislation and protocols.
- Intercultural knowledge, knowing the culture and the environment where the minors come from, social integration.
- Social and health care, integration into education and the labour market.
- Knowing different ‘innovative’ methods of work with vulnerable groups, knowing how to motivate them.
- Including international perspectives in the area (examples, good practices from other countries).

Professions providing social assistance to UAMS shall also have knowledge of:

- Key aspects of psychosocial support, recognising the needs of UAMS in this area (to be able to perceive cases of minors in need of such help).

Particularly important are personal competencies, ability of analytic understanding of situations, competence of behaviour/treatment. Among them, we stress the following which are specifically related to work with vulnerable groups of UAMS in transition to adulthood:

- cultural sensibility, tolerance towards other cultures,
- flexibility,
- openness for new experiences, readiness for own change, respect for other opinions,
- empathy,
- social skills.

Competencies that many professionals lack (feedbacks from professionals who participated at general training sessions in 2019 in Slovenia):

- Most respondents agreed that they would need more support for coping with their own stress, they would need better insight into international practices, and improve their knowledge on how to provide psychosocial support to UAMS and young adults.

Experts in Slovenia can get expert professional knowledge through various training, e.g.:

- Training for different professionals who work with unaccompanied minors (organised by UNESCO and Social chamber), topics: An outline of the UAMS legislation and approaches, Psychosocial support and assistance, Cultural competence, and presentation of good practices;
- Training for guardians (40-hour training);
- Training sessions CISOTRA.

Social Chamber issued the guide for development of competencies of professionals who work with migrants, titled *Holistic approach to successful integration of Migrants (Celostni pristop za uspešno integracijo migrantov, 2018)*.

Findings from CISOTRA Qualitative Research

- Poor efficiency of organisations is the result of a project-based way of working that prevents the development of sustainable and systemic solutions.

- Efficiency of organisations could be improved through study visits abroad; transfer of knowledge and practices from the international environment – and adaptation to the situation in Slovenia; joint national or international projects; regular joint meetings.
- Training for professionals should become permanent practice. Professionals who work with UAMS and young adults directly shall have empathy, social skills, know methods for work with young migrants and how to motivate them.
- Young migrants need holistic support system.
- It is necessary to provide better protection for minors who choose to leave Slovenia (ensuring safe transition to the target country).
- Several initiatives and concrete solutions are needed in the field of transition of minor migrants to adulthood – main emphasises:
 1. It is necessary to establish support programs for transition of unaccompanied children into adulthood. Support programs need to be focused on strengthening autonomy.
 2. Even before they turn 18, visits to institutions that can help them with empowerment (visit, get in touch, get to know people there) should be organised.
 3. It is important that adequate accommodation and care are provided even after they are 18.

Relevant Good Practices

In Slovenia, there are not many unaccompanied children, but there are some good practices, targeted at offering support to UAMS in transition to adulthood, and social integration overall. Below, three of them are presented.

Programme – Young Migrants¹

- Responsible organisations: Slovene Philanthropy.
- Short description: The objectives of the programme are to improve the protection of minor migrants, in particular unaccompanied children, children – asylum seekers and refugee children. For this purpose, several activities have been carried out, like mentoring activities for unaccompanied children, activities for psychosocial support – such as individual counselling, practical help with in-

¹ <https://www.filantropija.org/migracije/mladi-migranti/>.

tegration, activities for facilitation of integration in Slovenian environment, help with learning the Slovenian language, training of volunteers that work with unaccompanied children, etc.

- Duration of the project: The initiative started in 1997.

Accommodation of Minor Migrants into Student Residences

- Responsible organisations: Government of RS, service provider – Student residence of Forestry and Wood Technology School.
- Short description: In 2/2 of 2016, all unaccompanied children (that are asylum seekers) were transferred to appropriate accommodation facilities – student residence halls (educators and other workers take care of their well-being).
- Duration of the project: The project started in summer 2016 (Postojna and Gorica student residences). In Nova Gorica, it only lasted during the pilot stage (1 year); in 2020, the project was being carried out in Postojna for the 4th year (planned: until a permanent solution of accommodation will be found). (Urad Vlade RS za oskrbo in integracijo migrantov, 2018)

Practices are presented in detail in the document titled *Compilation of National Reports* (CISOTRA, 2021).

Skuhna

- Initiation of project: Skuhna is a result of social entrepreneurship project, initiated in 2012 by Association Global and Association Voluntariat, and co-financed by European social fund.
- Description: Through cooking, it connects refugees and migrants with the citizens of Slovenia. Skuhna is basically a social enterprise that employs migrants and Slovenes and offers traditional food from the countries from which migrants come. A great example of how to promote social integration, contribute to employability of migrants, and create an opportunity for dialogue in the right, creative way. Skuhna is located in Ljubljana.
- Duration: Ongoing initiative.

Conclusions and Recommendations from Project CISOTRA Specific for Slovenia

From the discussions that we had with young migrants (in transition) we can conclude that the main difficulties that they faced in Slovenia

were caused by not understanding the Slovenian language; it was exceedingly difficult to wait for status.

From the discussions at the CiSOTRA events, literature review and interviews, we can extract the following recommendations for Slovenia.

Recommendations related to UAMS

- Emotional support needs to be ensured.
- Support during educational process.
- Support in acquiring competences and gaining life skills, support for integration into the labour market, including help with finding a job.
- UAMS need to receive support in understanding the system of bureaucracy.
- System solution of accommodation needs to be found.
- To continue with initiatives that support intercultural dialogue, interactions between migrants and local people (a good example was the ArtCaffe initiative, a cafeteria in the Student Residence Postojna, hosted by migrants; also Skuhna practice).
- In general, focus needs to be put on assisting UAMS in transition to adulthood, through different support programs focused on strengthening autonomy and integrating them in 'regular' society.

Recommendations for Providers of Services

- There is a need for accepting an integrative national policy/national strategy in the field of unaccompanied children and unaccompanied minors.
- Cooperation between different actors.
- Regular training for professionals.
- Introduction of cultural mediators.

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