

**National Integration**

**Evaluation Mechanism**

**Slovenia**

**National Report for 2016**

***-Executive Summary-***

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The project is co-financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund in the frame of the project 'National Integration Evaluation Mechanism. Measuring and improving integration of beneficiaries of international protection'.

Safe harbour



EUROPEAN UNION  
Asylum, Migration  
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# Introduction

You hold in your hands a National Report on the implementation of various areas of integration policy towards beneficiaries of international protection in Slovenia. The report is the result of the evaluation of migration and integration policies in the EU Member States, implemented as part of the project “The National Integration Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM)”.

NIEM is a six-year long transnational project which aims to prepare key actors in the integration field in 16 EU Member States to better face the current challenges and improve the integration outcomes of beneficiaries of international protection. Representatives of academic centers, non-governmental organizations and think-tanks were invited to participate in the project.

The main aim of the project is to strengthen the competence of institutions involved in the integration of persons with international protection. Within the research part of the project, a tool has been developed to monitor and comprehensively evaluate the integration of beneficiaries of international protection and to identify good practices and obstacles in integration, as well as to assess the impact of legislative and policy changes. NIEM establishes a mechanism for a biennial, comprehensive assessment of the integration of beneficiaries of international protection.

The project is based on the assumption that the creation of any migration and integration policy should be based on reliable official data – statistical, legal, administrative, financial and public policy. It is difficult to shape a rational policy without such information, therefore it is important to implement the so-called “evidence based policy”, i.e. policy based on knowledge and empirical evidence. NIEM will provide evidence on the gaps in integration standards, identify promising practices and shortcomings in different countries, as well as evaluate the effects of legislative and policy changes which may provide a basis for a further development of an appropriate integration policy.

This report is the result of the first of three planned evaluation rounds – the so-called baseline evaluation, which consist of 186 indicators aimed at diagnosing of the existing situation. The subsequent evaluations are carried out periodically every two years. After each round respective national reports are issued, as well as a common European report comparing the examined dimensions of integration policies of all the countries participating in the NIEM project.

The present report, which covers the state of affairs until 31 December 2016, was drafted in 2018 on the basis of the indicators completed in 2017. It was first prepared in English (since the indicators were prepared in English, to allow for international comparison) and translated into Slovenian language. The report is addressed to representatives of public administration, academic and research centers, think-tanks, non-governmental organizations, as well as to all those dealing with migration and integration issues. We do hope that the report will be met with interest and will provide a good basis for creating policies and deepening the knowledge about the integration of the beneficiaries of international protection.

# Executive Summary

In the Republic of Slovenia, international protection refers to the refugee status and the subsidiary form of protection. Temporary protection refers to people who would receive this status in case of mass influx, provided that Directive 2001/55/EK was applied on the EU level, which has not happened yet.

**Refugee status** shall be granted to a third country national who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who is outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.

**The status of subsidiary form of protection** shall be granted to a third country national or a stateless person, who does not qualify for a refugee, when substantive grounds exist to suspect that upon his return to the country of origin, or in case of a stateless person, the country of last residence, the person would face real risk of being subject to serious harm as stipulated in the Law on International Protection.

In the period from 1995 to 2016, a total of 393 persons were granted international protection in the Republic of Slovenia. In 2016, 1308 asylum requests were filed in Slovenia and 170 persons were granted international protection. The majority of asylum seekers in Slovenia in 2016 were nationals of Afghanistan (419), Syria (281), Iraq (120), Pakistan (104), Iran (78), Turkey (60) and Algeria (42).

There is no strategy for the integration of beneficiaries of international protection in Slovenia. There is also no national strategy for the integration of migrants. There is only Strategy for economic migration for the period 2010-2020 focusing on migrant workers.

## Residence

Recognized refugees receive permanent residence permit upon recognition and status of a long-term resident after 5 years. Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection receive temporary residence permit upon recognition, and they can apply for permanent residence permit after 5 years; however, they can also receive the status of the long-term resident after 5 years (and time waiting for the decision is either in half or fully counted). As a result, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are in uncertain situation because they have to prolong their status and there is always a possibility that the Slovenian authorities claim there are no reasons for international protection anymore and they do not prolong it.

Beneficiaries of international protection (both those with refugee status and those with subsidiary protection) can become long-term residents after 5 years of legally residing in Slovenia but only if they meet all the conditions. A condition that is most difficult for them to meet is sufficient financial means.

### **Family reunification**

Recognized refugees can submit application for family reunification immediately upon recognition (and within 3 months after receiving their status they can apply under reduced conditions, after those 3 months the same requirements apply as for other TCNs). Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection that receive the protection for more than 1 year can apply for family reunification immediately (and within 3 months after receiving their status they can apply under reduced conditions, after those 3 months the same requirements apply as for other TCNs). Frequently, this time - 90 days upon their status recognition - is not enough for them to prepare all the needed documentation. If they miss this deadline they need to meet the same conditions as all other foreigners - the most difficult condition to meet is to show sufficient financial means to support all family members (292,56 euro per person per month). This means that after 90 days it is basically impossible for beneficiaries to meet the conditions. Another financial problem is that beneficiaries have to cover the travel costs for their family members in case of unification – from certain countries this can be very costly.

Family reunification procedure can only start when a beneficiary of international protection knows exactly where family members are and has the required documentation (especially proof of family ties). However, Slovenian authorities demand original documents also from

family members and for different reasons often people are not capable of delivering them. Also, it is frequently too difficult to provide documents clearly proving family ties. Usually documents provided are not accepted by Slovenian authorities as adequate. Slovenian authorities do not respect the principle of family unity. For example, unaccompanied minors can start family reunification procedure only for their parents but not their other (minor) siblings.

## **Citizenship**

The competent authority may, if it is in accordance with national interests, according to its discretion, grant the citizenship to a person with refugee status recognized under the law on asylum if they actually live in Slovenia uninterruptedly for five years before submitting an application and meets other conditions. The law mentions only the refugee status, however according to MoI also persons with subsidiary protection are considered under the same conditions. Economic resources requirement is the same for all TCNs and it is not mentioned under exemptions in the case of refugees; this condition is met if a person is employed and has a limited job contract for at least 2 years prior to the naturalization procedure, or if a person is employed and has a permanent job contract for at least 6 months prior to naturalization procedure. Language requirement is that the person shows knowledge of Slovenian language for everyday communication by a certificate of successful completion of the exam on the Slovene language at the basic level.

One of the conditions for naturalization is that a person has a release from current citizenship or can prove that he/she will get it if granted the citizenship of the Republic of Slovenia. However, Article 12 states that the competent authority may, if it is in accordance with national interests, according to its discretion, accept in the citizenship of Slovenia also a person with refugee status, recognized under the law on asylum, if he/she actually lives in Slovenia uninterruptedly for 5 years before submitting an application, and meets all other conditions of Article 10 of the Law, with the exception of having this release from current citizenship. Only three persons have applied for Slovenian citizenship in 2016 and 2 of them have been granted. One unsuccessful application from beneficiaries of international protection was rejected for economic resources requirements.

## **Socio-economic integration**

In 2016 there were 21 beneficiaries of international protection in integration house in Ljubljana and 49 beneficiaries of international protection in integration house in Maribor, 70 persons in total. The majority lived in integration houses for one year (which is the maximum possible duration of time). In Slovenia, the main problems are a lack of capacities and the conditions to have access to public housing.

## Housing

There are two integration houses in Slovenia with capacities for around 60 people. Once these two houses are full, there is no other public housing available for beneficiaries of international protection. Public housing is available either only to Slovenian citizens or in some cases to permanent residents in certain municipalities. Only beneficiaries of international protection with permanent residence (refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection after 5 years) have access to certain public housing, however, they have to compete with all other permanent residents and Slovene citizens who apply for the same public housing. This inevitably makes it very difficult or almost impossible to actually get public housing. Beneficiaries of international protection who are unemployed or without their own financial means are entitled to receive financial help from the state for the rent of private housing for up to 18 months and under certain conditions for additional 18 months. This condition has been new since 2016 and requires from the applicant at least 80% attendance at the Slovene language course.

The majority of beneficiaries therefore have to rent an apartment at the "open real-estate market" which also means regular market prices. These are often too high for beneficiaries, especially in Ljubljana - higher than the in-cash housing support they receive by the state. Also, when renting an apartment, it is expected by the owners that they would pay "security deposit" plus one rent in advance. Yet beneficiaries are usually waiting to receive financial help for more than one month or up to two months after the recognition of their status. In this period most of them do not have any financial means, not even for sustenance, and certainly not enough for the rent or two rents.

This financial situation has become much worse since the International Protection Act has been changed in 2016 and one-time financial help upon status recognition was abolished.



The other problem is that beneficiaries of international protection are facing a lot of discrimination and racism when searching for apartments. Many owners are not willing to rent their real estate to refugees, especially not to large families.

Beneficiaries of international protection who do not get a place in the integration house and are also unable to find private housing are then allowed to stay in the Asylum home also after they receive their status. There are several cases like this.

Unaccompanied minors (especially those younger than 15) are ensured accommodation in boarding schools.

Beneficiaries of international protection can become owners of property only after having obtained Slovenian citizenship.

## Employment

In 2016, 62 recognized refugees (10 female, 52 male) and 13 beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (all male) were employed (Government Office for Support and Integration of Migrants data). Beneficiaries of international protection have equal access to employment, but they do not have equal access to each position or vocation. The only policy adopted regarding the employment of beneficiaries of international protection is "the job training for persons with international protection" for six months; however, this policy only enables the training and not the actual employment, and also it does not mention any vulnerable groups.

Asylum seekers have access to employment only after 9 months and only if they did not receive a negative decision. Beneficiaries of international protection have access to employment in Slovenia, however it is a question what kind of job they are able to obtain (job related to their own profession or any kind of job or mainly physical work). Very often they do not have documents to prove their profession, skills or official education and it is difficult for them to obtain these documents.

Language is an additional barrier, since for the majority of jobs in Slovenia language proficiency is required. Moreover, many (or most) employers are not keen on employing refugees. Beneficiaries are facing a lot of discrimination and racism when searching for a job, sometimes employers do not know anything about their status and are unwilling to learn,

sometimes they think it would take them a lot of time to arrange all administrative matters to employ a refugee, and sometimes they think that refugees will eventually leave Slovenia thus it is not worth investing in them.

## **Education**

Persons with international protection share the same rights regarding pre-school, elementary, secondary, higher and adult and university education as Slovenian nationals. They have the right to scholarships and accommodation in student housing under the same conditions as Slovenian nationals. Funding for education and training of refugees is provided by the Ministry of Education and Sport.

Children of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors have the right to elementary-school education, however, only until the age of 15 which is the age of legal majority in Slovenia. They have to start attending elementary school in three months after lodging asylum application at the latest. All asylum seekers have the possibility while minor asylum seekers have the right to education in vocational and secondary schools under the same conditions as citizens of Slovenia. Asylum seekers are also granted access to higher and university education under the same conditions as Slovenian citizens.

The burden of proving the level of education obtained in the country of origin is on the asylum seeker. For all groups it is difficult to obtain required documentation to prove their already accomplished level of education or training. Without these documents it is difficult to get access to any vocational training (not only secondary vocational schools but also to other vocational trainings). One of the biggest challenges is the lack of knowledge of Slovenian language – exams for enrolling in some vocational or employment-related education are in Slovenian language, so if beneficiaries don't speak the language they can't even pass these exams.

There are no special vocational trainings or employment-related education programs for refugees, therefore they need to meet the same conditions as everyone else, which is often extremely difficult.

## **Healthcare**

Refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have the right to be included into mandatory health insurance scheme if their insurance is not provided from a different title.

Asylum seekers in Slovenia only have access to urgent medical care thus it is a question if their health issue is even recognized as "urgent" and treated or not. Since asylum procedures last for a long time (and considering the fact that people usually spent some months travelling to Slovenia) this leaves irreversible negative effects on people and their health condition (also when they are beneficiaries of international protection).

It is very difficult for beneficiaries of international protection (especially living in Maribor) to find their personal doctors. Doctors often reject refugees as their patients, saying they could not overcome the language barrier and they are afraid they might misinterpret certain symptoms if they are not able to talk to the person.

Language barrier is certainly one of the biggest challenges, especially because beneficiaries of international protection do not have access to (publicly financed) translators that could accompany them, and health institutions also do not have any translators employed. NGOs working with beneficiaries daily (for example those running the orientation program) have translators for certain languages, however they are not available always and for everyone.

### **Financial assistance**

According to the legislation, the level of social benefits of persons with international protection (not including persons under temporary protection) is equal to nationals in Slovenia, however the barriers are most often delays and long waiting periods.

Due to the abolition of one-time financial assistance (with the amendment of the International Protection Act in 2016), which allowed for bridging the gap, most refugees are facing severe financial distress and shortage in the first two months after gaining their status. For more than one month or even two they are waiting to receive regular social welfare, and until that time most refugees are without any financial means. Even later, when they already receive financial social assistance, beneficiaries often live in poverty. Since finding a job is very

difficult for beneficiaries of international protection, most of them rely on social welfare, however that is often not enough to cover all monthly costs.

### **Socio-cultural integration**

Beneficiaries of international protection have equal access to education as nationals (by law and in theory, however in practice they are facing several barriers). Since primary school is obligatory, enrolment is not a problem for primary school children. It can be an issue for secondary school students because they cannot choose school they would like to attend (vocational or high school) or schools are not willing to accept them because of the language barrier or because they don't have documents to prove their previous education or other reasons. Also, enrolment in universities can be difficult if a person does not have documents to prove previous education.

In 2016, 24 children with international protection were enrolled in kindergarten; 52 children with international protection (45 with parents with international protection, and 7 unaccompanied minors) in primary school; one asylum seeker was enrolled in secondary school and 2 asylum seekers were enrolled in university in Ljubljana.

Asylum seekers do not have access to publicly funded Slovenian language course, this is available only to beneficiaries of international protection. Asylum seekers can, however, attend adult education programs where they can learn basic Slovenian language (however this is not the official Slovenian language course).

Beneficiaries of international protection are entitled to 300 hours Slovenian language course, plus additionally they can attend 100 more hours. Those registered at national employment office as job seekers can get access also to additional Slovenian language classes, however this is not organized within the official Slovenian language course for foreigners. In case of families with small children it is often the case that only one parent attends the course and it is usually a man. Since there is only one language course beneficiaries can attend and since there is no parallel baby-sitting for small children organized, women often stay home with children.

After 300 hours of the language course most beneficiaries of international protection achieve level A1, some of them (but rare) perhaps level A2. To meet the condition for Slovenian citizenship the required level is A2 - B1, which is difficult for beneficiaries of international protection to achieve. Beneficiaries are supposed to attend 5 hours 5 days a week and the orientation program which is implemented by an NGO (Association Odnos). This NGO received limited financial means to implement the program therefore only certain number of people (staff and translators) could be employed – not enough to be able to deliver intense quality program plus address all the specific needs of the beneficiaries. After these first three months beneficiaries are often still not completely independent, self-reliable and confident to communicate with state institutions. The state does not support voluntary initiatives by offering funding for the national, regional, local coordination of these initiatives or making them part of the standard integration offers for beneficiaries of international protection (e.g. regular social orientation classes followed by voluntary one-to-one mentorship programmes), or offering guidelines, training and other support to evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives. Several NGOs nevertheless work and support beneficiaries of international protection in various ways, but mainly these NGOs are financed through EU projects, foreign donors/financers or donations or they work on voluntary basis. Still, some NGOs are implementing projects funded by the state (for example orientation program by the Slovene Philanthropy).