



Migration Profile

SLOVENIA

A. Executive Summary

Although it is one of the smallest European countries, Slovenia is experiencing different migration flows, especially internal ones from the peripheral regions to the more industrialised ones, and substantial arrivals, mainly from the Balkan countries.

Germany is the first destination country for Slovenes who decide to emigrate, looking for better economic opportunities. Work is the main reason for any type of migration flows, followed by family reunification. Migrants coming to Slovenia or moving within the country are mostly men, while women are consistently fewer.

The final stop on the Balkan Route and the gateway to Western Europe, since 2015 Slovenia has seen an increase in the number of asylum claims and transit of refugees and irregular migrants, mainly from Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Most of them are currently located in Bosnia and Herzegovina and attempt to cross the border in different ways, facing a variety of risks and obstacles often resulting in their own death.

Asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, especially if they are women or minors, are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. Victims of forced prostitution, both Slovene or foreign born, are exploited in the country, but often transit through Slovenia to be trafficked in Germany and Italy. Labour exploitation is also another phenomenon that unfortunately involves refugees and irregular migrants, as well as the Roma minority.

Local and European authorities, with the help of international organisations, have developed legal instruments and various programs to combat trafficking and regulate migration. The Catholic Church is also present through the action of the diocesan Caritas, but also through the ministry of various congregations present in the territory.

Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Slovenia is a member of the European Union, one of the smallest in terms of area and population, with about 2.1 million inhabitantsⁱ dislocated in a 20,480 sq. km territory. Slightly

more than half of them live in urban areas. The capital, Ljubljana, is the most populous city, with nearly 300,000 inhabitants.

Most Slovenes are Catholic (57.8%), followed by Muslims (2.4%), Orthodox (2.3%), other Christians (1%), and unaffiliated (3.5%), while the remaining 33% have specified no religion or are non-believers.ⁱⁱ

Even though Slovenia is not among the richest European countries, it has a stable economy, with relatively low unemployment, at 4.6% at the end of 2021, well below the European average of 7%. Youth unemployment is higher (almost 13%), however less if compared to 15% in the rest of Europe.ⁱⁱⁱ

II. International and Internal Migrants

In 2020, foreigners residing in Slovenia numbered 278,000, representing about 13% of the whole population.^{iv} Almost three-fifths are male. Their main countries of origin are European, particularly Balkan countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (44%), Serbia and Croatia (17% each), North Macedonia (7%), followed by Germany (3%).^v The outbreak of the pandemic and subsequent restrictions produced a decrease in new immigrants from 27,560 in 2019 to 24,750 in 2020. This also coincided with a more than 3-fold increase in returns from abroad of Slovenian emigrants, 11,360 in 2020 compared to 3,759 in 2019.^{vi} At the present moment, flows from Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, and Serbia remain steady.^{vii} Women in recent years have accounted for an ever-decreasing portion of arrivals: from 40% in 2015 to 28% in 2019; in 2020, however, there was a new increase that brings the female percentage back to 36%.^{viii}

The distribution of migrants in the territory is mainly influenced by the presence of compatriots and labour market opportunities, with important differences among the various ethnic groups.^{ix} For example, the Bosnians, although they are the largest immigrant group in almost all the regions of Slovenia, live mostly in Central Slovenia, which is more industrialised and urbanised. Instead, only 21% of the Kosovars live in the same central area, while the others are more evenly distributed throughout the territory where they primarily run family businesses. Croats, on the other hand, represent the majority of immigrants in the Mura region, with 36%.^x

Foreign workers are most often employed in construction, transport and logistics, and manufacturing.^{xi} Immigration to Slovenia is mainly due to work-related reasons, followed by family reunification, the latter especially for immigrants arriving from Kosovo.^{xii} Women in particular move mainly for family or study reasons and represent just over 14% of all foreign workers.^{xiii}

Internal migration is certainly the most frequent phenomenon in the country, involving about 100,000 individuals each year. In 2020 there were more than 127,000, including 20,000 foreigners, an increase of more than 40% over the previous year.^{xiv} This increase was largely due to the onset of the pandemic and the resulting restrictions, which prompted many to officially register their residence, even if only temporary, to avoid incurring penalties.^{xv} These were especially young adults, between the ages of 20 and 39, often the most educated and qualified, from peripheral regions, such as Mura, to central ones. This internal brain drain

attracts further migration, sharpening the dichotomy between the centre of the country and the peripheral regions.^{xvi}

Also in 2020, the statistical region of Central Slovenia (Osrednjeslovenska), home to the capital, Ljubljana, recorded the highest number of internal migrants, both incoming and outgoing, with a clear prevalence of the latter, followed by the statistical region of Oltre Drava, which recorded more incoming migrants than outgoing ones. The region that recorded more immigrants than emigrants was Upper Carniola.^{xvii}

Migrants in Slovenia may be more exposed to poverty, experience social exclusion, and have greater difficulty in finding adequate housing. Foreign workers are not infrequently victims of exploitation and irregular work relations. The most harassed categories seem to be truck drivers and cleaners. In the case of irregular migrants, they are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, as well as human trafficking.^{xviii}

Workplace safety also reflects difficult conditions for foreign workers. In 2017, there were a total of 17 occupational deaths, 47% of which were migrant workers.^{xix}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

In 2020, about 7.6% of the Slovene population was living abroad, approximately 160,000 people. Almost a third of them lived and worked in Germany (27.5%), while the other main destinations were Austria (15%), Croatia (11.5%), the USA (8.8%), and Serbia (7%).^{xx}

Emigration to Germany, Austria, and to other Western countries is mainly economic.^{xxi} Among the factors of attraction that should be considered, in addition to greater employment opportunities, are the important difference between average wages, higher in more industrialised countries with a higher cost of living,^{xxii} and the languages spoken, as in the case of German, which was spoken by about 47% of Slovenes, as of 2012.^{xxiii}

Three-quarters of Slovenian emigrants have obtained at least a secondary education, and of these, almost one-third have a third-level or higher degree.^{xxiv} About 40% of Slovenian emigrants are between 20 and 39 years old.^{xxv}

Slovenia is also the fourth largest country in Europe in terms of the number of posted workers, i.e., employees sent by their employers to work abroad. These workers, mainly migrants from the Western Balkan countries, are posted without valid work contracts and other necessary documentation. To maintain competitiveness, they are often housed in unsuitable temporary residences, forced to work unpaid overtime, or are paid below minimum wage. They are also denied vacation time and hours off, or rest after overtime.^{xxvi}

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)

Slovenia began hosting refugees even before it became independent in 1991, by welcoming refugees from the conflicts that erupted after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and following with those caused by the many conflicts in the Balkans.^{xxvii}

Since 2015, the number of asylum requests has grown steadily, from just under 300 to more than 3,800 requests. There were over 3,500 in 2020,^{xxxviii} slightly less than the previous year. Of those, 553 were unaccompanied minors (15%).^{xxxix} Most of the requests came from Morocco, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Algeria, and Bangladesh.^{xxx} However, those accepted in the last five years represent only 5% on average. Refugees living in the country in mid-2021, both those recognised or pending recognition, were just over a thousand, of whom a third were Syrians, and the rest mostly Afghans, Iranians, Eritreans, Iraqis, and Turks.^{xxxi}

Being at the end of the Western Balkan Route, since 2015 Slovenia has seen thousands of refugees and irregular migrants, trying to reach Europe from Africa and Asia Minor. Although these flows began to decrease after 2017, ebbing in 2018, however in 2019 local authorities recorded a new increase in illegal crossings into the Balkan countries.^{xxxii} The Western Balkans Migrant Route is extremely dangerous, called “the game” by migrants themselves because of the randomness with which it rewards or rejects, and sometimes kills, those who use it.^{xxxiii} Forced to travel by hiding on trucks and freight trains, or miles on foot, crossing rivers and inaccessible areas, sleeping roughly, exposed to the elements, malnourished and in extremely poor sanitary conditions, many do not make it. And even those who do, have often experienced traumas that are difficult to recover from. In addition to these dangers, refugees and illegal immigrants face a heightened vulnerability to human trafficking and crime in general.

In 2021, irregular migrants apprehended in the country numbered more than 10,000, mostly Afghans, Pakistanis, Bengalis, and Turks.^{xxxiv xxxv} In 2020, Italy quadrupled rejections from Slovenia, based on the 1996 bilateral agreement, reaching 962 of them from January to the end of September 2020, compared to 250 during the same period in 2019. In total, there were more than 1,000 rejections on the Italian-Slovenian border in 2020.^{xxxvi}

Undocumented migrants are detained at the Postojna reception centre.^{xxxvii} Those who apply for asylum are housed in the Asylum House in Ljubljana, which can accommodate up to 203 persons, or in one of its three branches: Kotnikova, housing mainly single men; Logatec, accommodating families and couples; and in the student dormitory in Postojna for unaccompanied children. At the end of 2020, the Asylum House and its branches housed 142 asylum seekers, despite its capacity of 400 people.^{xxxviii} Asylum seekers can also apply to reside in private housing. At the end of 2019, there were 26 residents in private housing.^{xxxix}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Among those most vulnerable to human trafficking in Slovenia there are refugees, undocumented migrants, and undocumented foreign and domestic workers. Even when they are not exploited in Slovenia, actual or potential victims often cross the country on their way to Austria, Germany, and Italy, where they are exploited in forced labour. Temporary employment agencies, or intermediaries in general, play a decisive role, directly or indirectly, in the exploitation of foreign workers. Asylum seekers waiting for their case to be assessed are legally prevented from working. This increases their vulnerability to trafficking. The main sectors where there are reports of exploitation in forced labour are construction, transportation, hospitality, and domestic service. The countries of origin for foreign victims

are primarily Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. Roma are also particularly vulnerable to trafficking, especially women and children, and often forced into begging.^{xi}

Most victims in Slovenia are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Prostitution of young women in Slovenian brothels and nightclubs is a thriving market that attracts clients from other European countries and is difficult to be eradicated. In fact, traffickers no longer physically coerce victims, and no longer restrict or control their movements, instead they use methods of psychological coercion, such as financial dependency. Women are thus forced to work out of real or often created economic necessity by the employers themselves, resulting for example from penalties for breaking house rules and work rules or from debt resulting from acquiring a work and transport permit in Slovenia, and do not recognize themselves as victims of trafficking according to the standards used by the police during investigations.^{xii}

Women and children from Slovenia as well as from Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, Latin America, and Southeast Asia are also trafficked or become victims of sexual exploitation and forced prostitution in Slovenia and Western Europe, mainly in Germany and Italy.^{xiii}

In 2020, authorities conducted twelve trafficking investigations, two less than in 2019, involving twelve suspects, nine from Slovenia, two from the Dominican Republic, and one from Romania. In the same year, likely due to the pandemic, the number of prosecutions dropped dramatically, from thirty-two to six.^{xiiii}

VI. National Legal Framework

The main legislation regarding immigration is the 2011 *Aliens Act*,^{xliv} which regulates the entry, exit and residence of foreign citizens in Slovenia, establishes the types of visas and the rights and duties of foreigners travelling or residing on Slovenian territory. These include, for example, the right to family reunification. The law was recently amended, in 2017 and 2021, resulting in a more restrictive policy towards migrants, foreign workers and their families, and students.^{xlv}

The 2016 International Protection Act (IPA) is the main standard regarding asylum and refugee rights.^{xlvi}

Human trafficking is prosecuted by Article 113 of the Criminal Code with penalties of one to ten years imprisonment for crimes involving an adult victim and up to fifteen years imprisonment if a child victim is involved, or there are other aggravating factors, such as fraud, use of force, and coercion.^{xlvii} Other trafficking-related offences include: enslavement (Art. 112), forced marriage (Art. 132a), exploitation of prostitution (Art. 175), and illegal employment (Art. 199). Finally, Art. 50 of the Law on Foreigners guarantees victims of trafficking and exploitation, even if they are irregularly and illegally present in the territory, to stay for a period, which can be further extended, of 90 days, in order to participate in investigations and judicial proceedings.^{xlviii}

Slovenia is a member of almost all the UN International Human Rights Treaties, having signed 17 and ratified 16 of them, with the exception of the 1990 Convention on the Protection of

Migrant Workers and their Families (ICPMW).^{xlix} It has also signed all the fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).¹ Being a member state of the European Union, it is subject to the laws that regulate the movement of people and the reception of refugees in the member states, such as the Dublin Convention (Regulation 604/2013)^{li} and the Schengen Area.^{lii}

VII. Main Actors

The State

The *Directorate of Internal Administrative Affairs, Migration, and Naturalisation* is the main actor in the field of immigration and asylum, being, among other things, the competent authority for most of the procedures involving applications for international protection.^{liii} Its responsibilities include monitoring and regulating migration flows and facilitating the integration of foreigners into Slovenian society.^{liiv}

The *Council for the Integration of Foreigners* makes recommendations on national programs for the integration of migrants and monitors the implementation of measures by participating in the development of laws and other regulations involving migrants.

The *Slovenian government* established in 2017 an Office for Migrant Support and Integration in the Ministry of Interior, which ensures the reception and integration of refugees and provides basic integration support to other migrants. It also appointed in 2020 a *National Coordinator Against Trafficking*, part of the Ministry of Interior which was followed by the establishment of an *Interdepartmental Working Group (IWG)*, both important institutional actors in the fight against human trafficking. The *Ministry of Interior* has been financing for years the project *Introducing the mechanism for recognition, assistance, and protection of victims of trafficking in human beings and/or sexual violence in asylum procedures in Slovenia (PATS)*, carried out in its own reception centre for asylum seekers.^{liv}

International Organisations

UNHCR in Slovenia operates through its Regional Office for Central Europe based in Budapest. It advises the Slovenian government, especially on legislation and refugee reception. It collaborates with NGOs to monitor reception and create public support for asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless persons.^{lvi} Among other agencies operating in Slovenia with relevant projects for migration and anti-trafficking it is worth mentioning UNICEF, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the latter currently involved in family reunification^{lvii} and projects to combat gender-based violence, human trafficking, and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

FRONTEX is the EU agency responsible for the supervision of European borders and the fight against human trafficking and smuggling, as well as organising returns. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) is the EU agency that coordinates efforts among member states to improve the implementation of the Common European Asylum System. It also develops strategies to eliminate human trafficking and coordinates programs involving other EU agencies.

NGOs and Other Organisations

The Christian Organizations Against Trafficking Network (COAT-NET) is an international network of over 45 Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox organisations working to combat human trafficking and assist victims. It is coordinated by Caritas Internationalis, and in Slovenia it is represented by Caritas Slovenia.

The SLOGA platform is a network of 19 NGOs addressing various social issues, with focus on integration, human rights, and sustainability. It collaborates with Caritas Slovenia in the MIND project aimed at raising public awareness on the issues of immigration and sustainable development.^{lviii}

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church in Slovenia is represented by the Slovenian Bishops' Conference (SŠK) and consists of two archdioceses, Ljubljana and Maribor, and 4 dioceses.^{lix}

Caritas Slovenia (Karitas), a member of Caritas Internationalis and Caritas Europa, is headquartered in Ljubljana where it employs about 30 people and 9,000 volunteers in six diocesan Caritas agencies and 444 parishes across Slovenia, carrying out activities in support of the most needy and vulnerable. Caritas' social assistance programs in Slovenia are aimed at helping victims of trafficking, with maternity homes for women and children, rehabilitation of drug addicts and health care for the homeless. Caritas emergency teams also provide humanitarian aid and logistical support in case of natural disasters, such as the floods of November 2012, when food, water, tents, and clothes were provided to over 4,100 people.^{lx} Activities carried out in support of migrants include material assistance with food and hygiene products, counselling, financial loans, support in finding accommodation, learning the language, and finding a job. Since 2017 Caritas Slovenia has been helping refugees and migrants on the Balkan route, also cooperating with local Caritas in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Caritas Slovenia is also engaged in raising public awareness and advocacy for migrants and refugees through various projects in cooperation with other Caritas agencies. One example is the Mind-Migration Interconnectedness Development project (October 2017-September 2020) led by Caritas Austria with Caritas Europa in cooperation with ten other Caritas organisations, including Caritas Slovenia, focusing on the causes of forced migration and the integration of migrants into host societies.

With the project *Monitoring of Forced Returns*, Caritas monitors forced returns of foreigners irregularly staying in Slovenia, making sure that their rights and dignity are safeguarded, and procedures are respected.^{lxi} The project *Development of Women Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in Southeast Serbia*, co-financed by the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aims to improve the rural economy and the condition of women in less developed areas of the country.^{lxii} With the advent of the pandemic, the project *VAU Included, Active, Achieved* seeks to respond to the needs of the elderly, young people, and migrants, forced to face situations of loneliness, isolation, exclusion, and difficulty of information.^{lxiii}

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has been working in Slovenia since 1999 and has established a permanent office in 2002, regularly visiting the Postojna detention centre, offering psychosocial support to detainees, who live in rather restrictive conditions. It is particularly engaged with asylum seekers, to whom it provides legal and administrative support, as well as psychological and social support, and integration programs, such as Slovenian language courses organised by volunteers. In order to raise public and political awareness, JRS organises educational seminars, conferences and cooperates with the local media to raise awareness on refugee, migration and development issues. JRS Slovenia also runs a monthly radio programme entitled “Building a more open society” hosted on the national Catholic radio station (Radio Ognjišče) which promotes a more positive attitude towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.^{lxiv}

The Order of Malta in Slovenia (SMOM) together with the Maltese Aid Association Slovenia (OMAS) carries out activities for the needy, especially the elderly, Roma people, families in need and young refugees. Home social and health care is offered to the elderly who are left alone, as well as transport and accompaniment services for those living in the most isolated rural areas and for the disabled. About 70 needy families receive regular food, clothing, and hygiene items. Between 2020 and 2021, a multi-purpose building was created to promote support for the Roma community in Novo Mesto, and basic learning items and tools were donated to a school with a strong presence of Roma children.^{lxv} Since 2019, with the initiative “Medical and other assistance to the Roma people”, water and electricity are provided to the Roma communities in Brezje and Žabjek.^{lxvi}

OMAS regularly collects and distributes donations including clothes, toys, and household utensils, as well as furniture components. Part of these donations were directed, in 2021, to the SGŠL Postojna Student Home, which houses young asylum seekers in Slovenia.^{lxvii}

Since 2019, SMOM has signed a partnership agreement with the Slovenian Civil Defence for disaster relief.^{lxviii} SMOM was awarded the Civil Defence Bronze Badge for its work during the 2015 ice storm.^{lxix}

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