

Monitoring Report on Migration, Integration, and Asylum Policies and Implementation in Slovenia from an Intersectional Lens of Gender, Ethnicity, and Sexuality 2023- 2024.

Within the *Gender Equity Towards Equality* program, supported by the Netherlands Helsinki Committee under the *Catalyst of Change* initiative, Reka Si conducted participatory research with women who are refugees, asylum seekers, or migrants through family reunification in Slovenia. This participatory research aimed to analyze migration, asylum, and integration policies from a gendered and intersectional perspective, seeking to unpack the invisible barriers faced by women and LGBTQIA+ people on the move. The initial stage combined desk and participatory research to frame the research questions from the lived experiences of the participants themselves.

This report is structured into three key sections: asylum, migration, and integration.

Asylum

Case Study of a Queer Asylum Seeker (anonymous)

- 1. Gender-Sensitive Translation Services**

The asylum seeker highlighted the absence of women translators in their case. Due to gender-specific needs, they required a woman translator but were discouraged from requesting one due to concerns about application delays. *Policy recommendation:* While acknowledging the limited availability of women translators in language combinations such as Arabic, Farsi, and Urdu with Slovene, it is critical to expand capacity to translate from and into English where possible. Cases involving women and queer asylum seekers should be prioritized. When a delay is due to a lack of women translators, applicants must be informed that this delay will be considered during their application processing.
- 2. Labour Market Access for Female Asylum Seekers with Children**

Despite policy improvements allowing asylum seekers to obtain work permits after nine months, women with children face financial barriers—most notably, the cost of kindergarten, which can reach up to 500 euros per month. This policy overlooks gendered migration patterns, where women often travel with children due to repressive gender norms in their countries of origin. *Policy recommendation:* Ensure access to subsidized applications, childcare services in asylum centers, or free kindergarten for asylum seekers with children.
- 3. Homophobic Comments from Translators**

Some applicants reported receiving homophobic remarks during asylum interviews. One

translator referred to homosexuality as "unsuitable" but "tolerated here" in Slovenia. Although the interviewer informed the applicant of the right to request a translator change, there were no anonymous channels for reporting, and the applicant was uncomfortable confronting the issue.

Policy recommendation: Implement mandatory training for translators and establish anonymous mechanisms for asylum seekers to report incidents involving gender- and sexuality-based discrimination or oppressive language.

Migration and Integration (Interviews with migrant and refugee women)

1. Forced and Arranged Marriages

Although Slovenian national laws prohibit forced marriages, cases persist involving arranged marriages—including between cousins—enforced through religious systems. These situations often go unreported due to complex issues such as social isolation and parallel realities. One participant shared her experience of "social death," having been isolated from social networks and subjected to domestic violence for over a decade in Slovenia.

Policy recommendation: Sustain women-only spaces and integration programs for migrant women. Ensure collaboration between CSOs and the employment office, particularly for migrant women registered as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). Mandate integration programs for girls and women, especially those at risk of domestic violence and social isolation. Empower agency and resist imposed victimhood by investing in collectives led by migrant and refugee women from diverse ethnicities and backgrounds.

2. Culturally Insensitive Divorce Laws

Slovenian divorce laws fail to consider the specific vulnerabilities of refugee and migrant women from certain ethnic backgrounds. One woman who migrated through family reunification reported threats from her ex-husband, who leveraged Slovenian custody laws and her unpaid caregiving responsibilities to manipulate her. These laws do not account for how women from patriarchal backgrounds were forced out of education and face significant linguistic and cultural barriers to achieving economic independence in Slovenia.

Policy recommendation: Adapt divorce laws to reflect intercultural sensitivities. Women from ethnic backgrounds where harmful cultural practices are prevalent should be granted legal privileges that seek to rebalance and repair historical and systemic harm.

Conclusion

This report highlights how migration, asylum, and integration policies in Slovenia—while formally neutral or protective—can perpetuate structural inequalities when they fail to consider gender, ethnicity, and sexuality as intersecting axes of discrimination. The experiences shared through this

participatory research reveal how bureaucratic processes, cultural insensitivities, and limited resources can exclude the most vulnerable, especially women and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

A truly inclusive and equitable migration policy must actively work to dismantle systemic barriers rather than simply accommodating them. By prioritizing lived experiences, recognizing culturally specific vulnerabilities, and embedding gender mainstreaming throughout institutional structures, Slovenia can move closer to realizing sexual and reproductive justice and social equity for all people on the move.

Policymakers, institutions, and civil society must collaborate to co-design transformative, intersectional, and community-led responses—grounded in justice, dignity, and human rights. The voices of those most affected must no longer be seen as marginal, but as central to shaping policies that reflect and serve the complex realities of migration today.