

Fostering political participation and policy involvement of immigrants in 9 Central and Eastern EU countries

Civic engagement of immigrants in different associations in Slovenia

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1.) Legal background and statistics

Organizations

There is no special type of organization that would serve merely to immigrants. There is also no umbrella organization, nor data on the involvement of immigrants in NGOs in the Republic of Slovenia. The only registry there is, is from the registry intended for societies and associations. Also available is the data collected by the national umbrella organizations like the Centre for Information Service, Co-operation and Development of NGOs – CNVOS and by the government Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services (AJPES). General statistical data about NGOs is therefore accessible.

Majority of the “immigrant organizations” in Slovenia are NGOs, either organized as a society/association or as a private institute. When saying “immigrant organizations” we can talk about organizations in which immigrants can participate either as workers or as volunteers and the types of organizations that can be established by immigrant communities or individuals. The focus of such organizations is either to preserve the traditional culture, folklore of the country of origin or helping with the integration process and helping with the inclusion of immigrants in the decision making process with the increase of political participation.

Associations/societies

Societies and associations are the most common form of organization in the NGO sector in the Republic of Slovenia, if we look at the statistics in the year 2014 they represented 88% of the NGO sector. (CNVOS, 2015)

Associations/societies and their establishment and work is defined in the Societies Act. The Act delivers the definition of a society: The Society is an independent and non-profit association formed

by the founder or founders, in accordance with this Act, set up to meet their common interests. (The Societies Act, 2015)

There are no restrictions defined by the Act that would prevent third country nationals or for that matter anyone to join or form a society or association. The article 2 of the Societies Act specifies who has the right to form a society and also who can become its member, it states that anyone can become a member of the Society but he/she must operate and work in the Society under conditions determined by the Basic act of the society. (The Societies Act, 2015)

The definition who can establish a society or association is defined in Article 8, which states: The Society may be established with a minimum of three business capable private individuals or legal entities. (The Societies Act, 2015) Therefore there are no restrictions who establish and who legally represents the society or association. The only defined limitation is that it has to be an individual or legal entity with legal (business) capacity. Legal capacity is defined as the ability to be a subject of rights and duties. An individual gets the legal capacity with birth, but it gets the legal business capacity when he or she reaches the age of majority at 18 years. Legal entity shall acquire the legal capacity with the entry in the register of companies. (Perklik, 2015)

The only restrictions in the Societies Act are defined in article 3. Where it is written that it is: (1) not allowed to establish a society whose purpose, objectives or activities are aimed in the violent change of the constitutional system, or to commit criminal acts or incitement to national, racial, religious or other discrimination and promoting of violence and war. (2) It is not allowed to establish a society whose purpose is to generate profit or associations whose sole activity is profit, nor is the functioning of such societies allowed. (The Societies Act, 2015)

Umbrella organizations – associations and unions of societies

The Societies Act allows the formation of associations or unions of societies. Article 16 states: At least two societies are allowed to establish a union of societies. (The Societies Act, 2015) The decision to form a union has to come from all the membership of all societies, which usually meet yearly in the convention of members. Immigrant organizations have an option to form networks of immigrant organizations or a so called umbrella organizations. Unfortunately there is no national umbrella organization of immigrant organizations.

We can mention some ethnic umbrella immigrant associations and unions in the Republic of Slovenia: The Association of Cultural Societies of Constitutive Nations and Nationalities of the former SFRY in Slovenia (Zveza zvez kulturnih društev konstitutivnih narodov in narodnosti razpadle SFRJ v Sloveniji), Bosniak Cultural Union of Slovenia (Bošnjaška kulturna zveza v Sloveniji), Association of

Serbian societies in Slovenia (Zveza srbskih društev Slovenije), Association of Macedonian cultural societies in Slovenia (Zveza makedonskih kulturnih društev Slovenije)...

Institutes

There are two types of institutes in the Republic of Slovenia – public institutes and private institutes. The main difference compared to associations or societies is that institutes do not have membership. Associations and societies are managed by its members while the institute is managed by its council and the director of the institute. The definition of an institution is written in article 1 of the Institutes Act: Institutions are organizations that are set up to perform activities of education, science, culture, sport, health, social care, child care, disability care and social security or other activities if the purpose of the business is non-profitable. (Institutes Act, 2015) Article 2 specifies who can establish the institute and it states: Institutions may be established by domestic and foreign private individuals or legal entities, if the law does not state differently. (Institutes Act, 2015) Therefore allowing also immigrants to form institutes. (Institutes Act, 2015)

Trade unions

Important part of the organized defence of labour rights, especially for migrant workers is carried out by trade unions. Today there are seven representative trade union confederations in Slovenia, in addition to 28 trade unions that are representative for individual sectors or professions«. (ZSSS, 2015) The largest confederation of trade unions in the Republic of Slovenia is The Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia – (ZSSS).

Membership in trade unions for migrant workers is not universal for all confederations or individual sector trade unions. Statute of the trade union specifies if a migrant worker can become a union member or not. Generally there are three possibilities for what is written in the Slovene trade union statutes or in reality implemented. The statute either explicitly allows the membership or it does not deal with the issue of migrant workers. Third option is that formally it is not possible for migrant workers to become members, but the trade union still enrolls them and allows their membership.

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2.) Migrant NGO's in Slovenia – from the superficial review to the case study

Superficial review

In the first part we did an analysis of the webpages of 20 migrant organizations. The aim was to see what type of organizations are active and what are their main activities, do they have any employees or volunteers and which ethnic groups do they represent in general it will give us a cursory glance at the state of migrant organizations in the Republic of Slovenia. In the second part we tried to get more in depth data about migrant organizations. We conducted informal interviews with five organizations.

Out of the 20 organizations by ethnic groups there were three Macedonian, Bosnian and African organizations. Followed by two Serbian, Russian and a Montenegrin and one Arabian, Nigerian, Ukrainian, Albanian and Iraqi/Arab migrant organizations.

The majority is registered as a society (a lot as cultural society) and a few as an institute. Out of the chosen organizations, some have a longer history of work than the others. We cannot say either the new or the older ones prevail. The average year of establishment is 2001.

Activities of migrant organizations could be divided into three groups. First and also the most represented would be the ones that aim at preservation of the ethnic culture and traditions, language and folklore. The second group would be the ones that are in any way helping with the integration of new immigrants coming to the country. Such organizations are in the minority out of the twenty chosen organizations – only five. Integration is also not their only or their main activity majority also has some cultural activities. The third group would be all other activities that they are conducting.

The main activities in the field of ethnic culture and preservation of the language, traditions and culture from the country of origin are diverse. More than half of the organizations have a folklore group which deals with the preservation of traditional dances and songs from the country of origin. Frequent activities are also: intercultural dialogue, promotion and round tables about literature from the country of origin, preservation of the mother tongue, language schools, choirs, organization of concerts, theatre groups, organization of exhibitions, events celebrating national holidays and important persons from the county of origin and promotion of traditional cuisine.

The second group of activities dealing with integration of immigrants has a variety of different activities. To further divide the offered services into two groups. The first would be orientated towards immigrant families and individuals. Services like assistance and help for families and individuals, searching for accommodation, help with enrolment of youth in the education system, finding a family doctor, help with bureaucratic procedures – translation of documents and arranging health insurance. The other group of activities are more general: advocacy of immigrant topics, publishing educational and analytical publications.

The third group of activities is the most diverse. There are many things that the organizations are doing, especially in projects. We can nonetheless point out some activities that are occurring more often than the others. The most common activities include: sport events, round tables, variety of workshops, media - production of newspapers, radio shows, television shows, humanitarian activities, events encouraging the membership to socialize – excursions and picnics, organization of conferences and last but not least, an important activity especially for associations/unions of societies is coordination of the organizations-members of the association/union.

It is almost impossible to say an exact number how many people are involved in the organizations that were included in the sample of the analysis. Every society has its own membership, while institutes cannot have members. Exact number of members, employees and volunteers is unfortunately impossible to tell, because the data is not available.

Volunteers are an important workforce for societies in general as they are non-profit organizations and usually cannot pay for employments. Precise data is unfortunately not available. None of the twenty organizations are members of the national network of volunteer organizations Prostovoljsto.org. In the available data, reachable through the websites, we can conclude that some organizations are either searching for volunteers or mention volunteers. Out of the twenty analysed webpages of migrant organizations six of them have data that they also include volunteers in their activities. The number is probably a lot higher as also all members in the organizations, which are

formally registered as societies, usually work in the society voluntary especially in the cultural societies.

Of course we cannot generalize the results presented to all migrant organizations in the Republic of Slovenia because of the small sample size. The results can serve as an orientation or as a superficial indicator of the status and situations of migrant organizations in the Republic of Slovenia.

Informal interviews with five migrant organizations

For the purpose of the study we also contacted five migrant organizations. The data presented here was gathered either with the informal interviews or via email in 2015. We managed to get responses from individuals active in different migrant organizations coming from different ethnic backgrounds: Serbian, Bosnian, Russian and African migrant organizations.

Formally the interviewed organizations are registered: three as institutes, one as society and one as association/union of 9 societies.

Activities

Similar to the first analysis of activities gathered through webpages, the five interviewed organization can also be divided into three groups. Firstly there are organizations, which aim at preservation of the ethnic culture and traditions, language and folklore. The main activities of the interviewed organizations are: intercultural dialogue, round tables about and promotion of literature from the country of origin, preservation of the mother tongue, language schools, organization of concerts, theatre groups, organizing exhibitions, events celebrating national holidays and important persons from the county of origin.

The second group would be the ones that are in any way helping with the integration of new immigrants coming to the country. The main activities here are: providing everyday help and counselling for immigrant families and individuals and helping with the process of obtaining citizenship and other legal documents.

The third group of activities are basically all the other activities that the interviewed organizations are performing: a variety of different topics addressed in projects, sport events, round tables and workshops addressing different topics, media production (two produce their own newspaper, two produced radio shows and one a television show), humanitarian activities, events encouraging the membership to socialize (excursions, picnics), searching for ways of business, cultural and sport

cooperation between the country of origin and the Republic of Slovenia, organization of international and local conferences and an important activity for associations/unions of societies is coordination of the organizations-members of the association/union.

Employees

Number of employees in the five organizations varies through time. Closely correlated with the fluctuation of the workforce is the number of projects that the organization has. At the time of the interviews three organizations were without employees and two had employees. One had 4 employees and the other 1.5 employees. When asked for the last year – 2014, the situation was quite different – two were still without employees while the other three employed together 10.5 people. More than half of the employees were and are still immigrants. One has at the moment all four employees with the migrant background.

Volunteers

Volunteers are very important for the activities of 4 out of 5 organizations. One institute does not include volunteers, while the other four organizations do. All four of them have a lot more volunteers than employees. Representation of immigrants in the volunteer group is also quite high – more than 50% up to 100%. The union of societies joins together 9 societies, emphasized that they and their members could not imagine organizing cultural events without the help of volunteers. Volunteers' help with the organization, management of events, preparation of food and host guests' performers from other countries etc...

Funds

Organizations get the mayor part of funds from different projects. Only one institute has diverse financing: selling their own services, through projects, donations and subsidies. Other four organizations are for the most part funded by different projects. A very small portion of funds comes also from membership fees and small donations of a couple hundred Euros.

Cooperation

There is no umbrella organization for all migrant organizations, regardless of the country of origin. Some societies sometimes decide to form an association/union of societies usually with the same ethnic background. We could find associations/unions of immigrants from most countries of the former Yugoslavia. There is also a federation of associations, combining migrant associations/unions from the former Yugoslav republics. While for other ethnicities it is rare to organize in that way. One reason is probably also the fact that immigrants from the former Yugoslavia represent the biggest

group of immigrants in Slovenia. Hence the number of migrant organizations formed by immigrants from the former Yugoslavia is a lot higher.

One of the interviewed organizations emphasized that the problem why there is no umbrella organization of African organizations in the Republic of Slovenia is mainly because the community is not that large and personal conflicts prevail over common interest.

All interviewed organizations support the establishment of an umbrella organization for migrant organizations. They pointed out that the level of coordination would increase with such organization. As many migrant organizations are more focused on the preservation of traditional cultures and folklore than on integration of immigrants, some pointed out that such organizations would not want to participate in the umbrella organization of immigrants. On the other hand NGOs that are working actively with immigrants and integration, but are not immigrant organizations themselves, should participate in an umbrella organization of migrant organizations. Some interviewed organizations suggested that the umbrella organization has to have authority from the government for issuing proposals and recommendations, which the government would recognize and acknowledge and also implement.

Some of the problems they pointed out were: organizations usually have stronger feelings for their national affiliation than the feeling of being part of an immigrant community.

Otherwise the interviewed organizations answered that they cooperate with each other, with other migrant organizations, also with other NGOs also from the region and wider, different platforms that are joining together different NGOs, with municipalities, with Ministries, with universities, also they cooperate with embassies and their countries of origin. These are different forms of cooperation from merely inviting others for participation in events, to project cooperation and co-financing.

Out of the five interviewed only one organization cooperated with trade unions in a project battling the exploitation of migrant workers. Others answered that until now they did not cooperate with trade unions.

Problems of migrant organizations

Formal registration of “migrant” organizations and office space

A couple organizations suggested the introduction of a specific type of organization for immigrants, which would be defined by law. The law would have to take into consideration that the employees working in such organizations are part of the vulnerable group, which needs additional support. Also some have said they lack support of the government in providing them with some subsidised space for the office and also facilities to carry out their activities (rehearsals for folklore dance groups, rehearsals for theatre groups, music and other activities). Three of the interviewed organizations are lucky enough to have an office while other two do not have their own space.

Co-financing of projects

There were also suggestions for the improvements of project work. One of the problems, which prevent organizations to send proposals for projects, is co-financing. One organization mentioned that paying 25% from their funds to co-finance a project is in their financial circumstance not possible because they do not make enough money through membership fees and other services to cover the expenses. Hence they cannot submit project proposals, where co-financing is one of the conditions for the proposal.

A very big problem is the high dependence of financing for migrant organization through projects. There are fewer and fewer organizations that have diverse financing. Sometimes the problem in projects is also the amount of funds, which do not even cover the whole costs of the project. The other often mentioned problem is the bureaucratic obstacles in European and national projects, which often causes that the person working in the project spends most of his time filling out timesheets and formal documents instead of working on the content of the project.

Precarious work and subsidies

Employments in the NGO sector and especially in migrant organizations are also not quite safe. They range from voluntary afternoon work, to a variety of employments part time and full time but with the ever present risk of losing work tomorrow. Migrant organizations never have enough employees, to satisfy the need of the work load. Another specific is that everyone does everything and there are no divisions of tasks, all this can lead to exhaustion of employees. One organization suggested that the government should provide subsidies for the systematic employment of immigrants.

Umbrella organization

Some of the interviewed organizations pointed out how useful it would be to also have an umbrella organization of migrant organizations in general regardless of the ethnicity, which would lobby for migrant organizations and at the same time serve as a pressure group for migrant organizations.

Struggling for media space

Some of them emphasized the difficulty of appearing in the media. Firstly the media rarely reports a story about the work of the different migrant organizations. Secondly there is not a lot of media that would be willing to give them media space to produce their own contents. A bright example is the independent radio station Radio Student. A Bosnian and a Serbian organization interviewed produced radio shows in their mother tongue on Radio Student.

Case study – Serbian Cultural Center Danilo Kiš (SKC Danilo Kiš)

Serbian Cultural Center Danilo Kiš or short SKC Danilo Kiš is a small and very young immigrant organization. The initiative started in 2009, but the institute was officially registered in 2010.

The reason why SKC Danilo Kiš was chosen for the case study is because of the fact that they stand out a bit from the rest of the traditional Serbian cultural centres and organizations. SKC Danilo Kiš is trying to break the predominant stereotype in Slovenia about the Serbian culture and tries to show that there is more to Serbian culture than just turbo-folk culture. Their aim is to find new ways of cooperation between Serbian and Slovene art and culture. They are trying to bring contemporary and alternative culture from Serbia and the region (the Balkans), also to the Republic of Slovenia by hosting contemporary Serbian artists in Slovenia. Additional decisive fact is also that all of the current employees are immigrants. All employees had their first residence registered outside of the Republic of Slovenia. Some have until now already acquired Slovene citizenship. The volunteers that are helping the institute are also in majority immigrants. This is quite rare in comparison to other immigrant organizations that the majority of the employed and volunteers are immigrants.

SKC Danilo Kiš is active in different fields of work, but we can summarize the main activities of the institute and the projects, that they were working on: promotion of non-established and contemporary artists from Serbia and their introduction in Slovenia, organization of different cultural events, ceremonies, memorials and art exhibitions. One of the projects was dealing with theatre to be more precise with an old Turkish method of shadow theatre. Also in different projects they

produced short movies. They also run the only regular radio show in Serbian titled Kontrola leta on Radio Student. Preservation of Serbian language is also one of their important fields of work. They organize courses in Serbian language, anthropology and culture and also offer translations into Serbian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, Macedonian, English, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish language. Additionally they also organize different workshops, lectures and round tables etc. One of the projects was dealing with empowerment of women and establishing a network of women's organizations from Slovenia and Serbia.

Currently there are four people employed at the institute and as mentioned above, all four of them have a migrant background as they were all born in Serbia. Before that there were no employees. The workers have been changing through time. Employments were always strongly related on the number of projects, which financed the employments. At least for the last three years they have managed to keep four employments through a variety of projects. The employments were never limited only to people with a migrant background.

The institute is financed only through projects. Occasionally they receive small donations of a couple of hundred Euros for different cultural events. They submit project proposals for local – municipal, national and international projects.

Volunteers play an important part in the institute. Roughly there are 25 volunteers helping on and off in different activities and events. Out of the 25 approximately 80% of volunteers are immigrants. Volunteer population in the organization is comprised out of young Serbian students on different student exchange programs at the University of Ljubljana or students in the Erasmus program. SKC Danilo Kiš recently noticed an increase of young people searching for volunteer work and turning to their organization looking for opportunities. Especially immigrant youth from Serbia, but they are not limiting their work only on Serbs. Because of the increase in immigrant youth, turning to SKC Danilo Kiš, they are searching for possibilities to propose a project and activities that would address the mentioned population.

SKC Danilo Kiš is open for cooperation with different NGO's in Slovenia and the Balkans and other organizations. They already cooperated with different organizations from Slovenia and the region.

Like all similar organizations in the NGO sector, SKC is struggling with precarious employments and dependence on projects. In the last couple of years they have managed to secure a few employments that are unfortunately not guaranteed in the future. The organization has grown in capacity – the number of employees and volunteers is increasing. It has also shifted its strategic goals and spread the original fields of work into new fields and is constantly searching for new ones. With

the good support of the local and national governments, not with subsidiaries but with funds for projects that aim to improve the Serbian and other ethnicities of immigrants in the Republic of Slovenia, the organization and the immigrant communities can benefit incredibly.

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3.) Recommendations

Out of the interviews, we gathered a lot of recommendations, which the migrant organizations themselves identified as topics that need to be addressed. We can divide the recommendations in three parts – recommendations to policy makers, recommendations to other stakeholders and recommendations to migrant organizations.

The first part consists of recommendations to policy makers. Migrant organizations need the support of policy makers on the national and local level. Also to enable a special type of organization - “migrant organization” supported by the legislation which takes into account that migrant organizations are not in the equal position as other NGOs. The mere fact that they have a lot smaller social network and language barrier have to be taken into account. Governments should support migrant organizations with subsidies for employments of immigrants to prevent precarious project work, help with funding of facilities that are needed for the activities of migrant organizations, creating special funding for migrant organizations especially to help with co-financing projects, training programs and information. Migrant organizations should also be included in the dialogue with the local and national government – through local and national advisory bodies. For the open flow of information between migrant organizations a public database of migrant organizations should be established. Another important measure to increase the flow of information is also facilitation of the access of migrant organizations to public media.

The second part is recommendations to trade unions. As migrant workers are easy targets for exploitation, trade unions should generally accept migrant workers as members and defend their workers’ rights.

Third part is recommendations to migrant organizations. First of all the migrant organizations need to implement the most diversified sources of funding. Secondly at the moment there is no real coordination of migrant organizations in the Republic of Slovenia in a form of an umbrella organization. There are some unions/associations, but not on the local or national level and none of the existent union/associations include a larger proportion of migrant organizations. An umbrella organization, should also find ways of communication and cooperation with all stakeholders involved in the field of migrant organizations and integration of immigrants. An umbrella organization that holds a strong representativeness and has the support of a variety of migrant organizations can become an important player in the defence of migrant organizations rights and proposals in the communication between the government and migrant organizations and immigrant communities.