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THE HOUSING SITUATION OF MIGRANTS IN SLOVENIA

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A. Introduction

The importance of adequate housing (housing that is secure, affordable, accessible etc.)¹ is recognised in many political and legal documents at the international and European level.² The application of these principles by national governments, however, continues to be inadequate,³ particularly concerning migrant housing.

Migrants (foreign nationals) constitute approximately 10% of the population in Slovenia⁴ and represent around 15,8% of the employed population.⁵ They are confronted with many barriers when acquiring affordable and quality housing. Scarce housing, high rents and poor living conditions are among the most prevalent challenges they encounter, with housing-related difficulties often resulting in spatial exclusion, thereby contributing to a lower quality of life and further marginalisation.⁶

The present report aims to shed light on the general housing situation in Slovenia, with a focus on adequate housing and the specific housing situation of migrants. The focus is particularly on third-country nationals, i.e. migrants who are not nationals of EU member states, including migrant workers, beneficiaries of international protection and their families.⁷

1 Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, n.d., The human right to adequate housing, URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/human-right-adequate-housing>.

2 See e.g. the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements (United Nations, 1996, The Habitat Agenda, Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements), European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2021 on access to decent and affordable housing for all (European Parliament, 2021, European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2021 on access to decent and affordable housing for all), Article 34(3) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Official Journal of the European Communities C 83/389), Article 31 of the European Social Charter (Council of Europe, European social charter (revised), 1999, CETS no. 163) and Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1966, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

3 Filipovič Hrast, 2005, Stanovanjski vidik izključenosti migrantov v Sloveniji, p. 98.

4 Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2024, Število prebivalcev v letu 2023 zraslo, URL: <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/News/Index/12809>.

5 Data for May 2024. See Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2024, Največ delovno aktivnih doslej, povečuje se delež tujcev, URL: <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/News/Index/12986>.

6 NGO Network of Integration Focal Points, n.d., Policy Briefing on Housing for Refugees and Migrants in Europe, p. 2.

7 The housing situation of asylum seekers will be mentioned but is not the focus of this report due to the specific regulation of the housing of asylum seekers, which is (mostly) centralised and run by the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants (see particularly Article 82 of the International Protection Act).

B. Legal and political framework of adequate housing with a focus on migrants

One of the most relevant documents regarding housing policy in Slovenia is the National Housing Programme. The National Housing Programme for the period 2015-2025⁸ provides general and long-term housing policy objectives and recognises the need to balance the supply of housing on the market and enable access to housing.⁹ Specifically in relation to the housing of migrants, it also recognizes that the increasing migration flows and the growing pressure on urban centres are growingly raising the issue of how to address the housing problem of immigrants, especially those who are long-term residents, with greater priority.¹⁰ However, no specific measures that could directly address this problem are mentioned in the programme.¹¹ Furthermore, it is important to note that promoting the socio-economic integration of migrants through integrated measures, such as housing and social services, is one of the specific goals set in the draft of the European cohesion policy programme 2021-2027 in Slovenia.¹²

Adequate housing is also specifically addressed in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia.¹³ Article 78 of the Constitution explicitly regulates the acquisition of adequate housing and stipulates that the state must provide opportunities for citizens to acquire adequate housing. The said provision is, however, only a so-called “guiding” provision, from which no specific (human) right is directly derived.¹⁴ The Constitution therefore does not guarantee the right to housing¹⁵ and the state is not obliged to provide housing to everyone but is merely obliged to pursue an active policy of resolving the housing issue.¹⁶

Due to the formulation of Article 78, which regulates the acquisition of adequate housing and explicitly refers only to citizens, the state is (explicitly) obliged to ensure such conditions solely for citizens and not for the rest of the population (e.g. long-term residents). However, in the light of EU law, the provision also applies to EU citizens, while some stipulate that with the use of the

8 Resolucija o nacionalnem stanovanjskem programu 2015-2025, Uradni list RS, št. 92/15.

9 See paragraph 3, section 2 and subsection 3.2. of the Resolution on the National Housing Programme 2015-2025.

10 See paragraph 8 subsection 3.2. of the Resolution on the National Housing Programme 2015-2025.

11 International Organization for Migration, 2021, Includ-EU, Regional and Local Expertise, Exchange and Engagement for Enhanced Social Cohesion in Europe: Housing, p. 16

12 Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy of the Republic of Slovenia, 2022, Program evropske kohezijske politike v obdobju 2021-2027 v Sloveniji: Osnutek, Različica 2.0, p. 205 and 232.

13 Ustava Republike Slovenije, Uradni list RS, št. 33/91-I, 42/97 - UZS68, 66/00 - UZ80, 24/03 - UZ3a, 47, 68, 69/04 - UZ14, 69/04 - UZ43, 69/04 - UZ50, 68/06 - UZ121,140,143, 47/13 - UZ148, 47/13 - UZ90,97,99, 75/16 - UZ70a in 92/21 - UZ62a.

14 Kresal, 2002, Komentar Ustave Republike Slovenije, p. 761-762).

15 Ibid., p. 763.

16 Letnar Černič, 2019, Komentar Ustave Republike Slovenije, p. 615. The Constitution does, however, explicitly protect housing that an individual already possesses or resides in, particularly in the scope of the right to private property (Article 30) and the inviolability of dwellings (Article 36).

teleological interpretation the scope of its beneficiaries can also be extended to applicants for international protection and other persons who temporarily find themselves in a vulnerable situation.¹⁷ It needs to be noted that the wording of Article 78 of the Constitution, which creates a distinction on the basis of nationality, is questionable in the light of the European Social Charter¹⁸ and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union¹⁹ as neither of the said legal documents conditions the state's obligation to ensure adequate housing with nationality or citizenship.²⁰

At a statutory level, housing is primarily regulated in the Housing Act,²¹ which, among other things, regulates housing tenancy relations, construction and the sale of new housing, assistance in the acquisition and use of housing, as well as competences and tasks of the state and municipalities in the area of housing.²² In relation to access to affordable housing, it needs to be noted that it also regulates access to non-profit housing,²³ subsidies for market and non-profit rents²⁴ and loans with a favourable interest rate.²⁵

Migrants are in many ways excluded from the social schemes provided by the said Act. They are (in principle) not eligible for non-profit housing as the Housing Act stipulates that only citizens of the Republic of Slovenia who meet the relevant conditions can be beneficiaries of non-profit housing.²⁶ The said Act does, however, extend access to non-profit housing to citizens of EU Member States on the condition of reciprocity.²⁷ Therefore, primarily third-country nationals are excluded.²⁸ Furthermore, third-country national cannot obtain a subsidy for the payment of the market rent as in accordance with the Housing Act the possibility of receiving such a subsidy is conditioned with applying to the tender for non-profit housing,²⁹ which third-country nationals cannot apply for as

17 Letnar Černič, 2019, Komentar Ustave Republike Slovenije, p. 615.

18 Council of Europe, European social charter (revised), 1999, CETS no. 163.

19 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Official Journal of the European Communities C 83/389.

20 Kresal, 2002, Komentar Ustave Republike Slovenije, p. 762.

21 Stanovanjski zakon, Uradni list RS, št. 69/03, 18/04 - ZVKSES, 47/06 - ZEN, 45/08 - ZVEtL, 57/08, 62/10 - ZUPJS, 56/11 - odl. US, 87/11, 40/12 - ZUJF, 14/17 - odl. US, 27/17, 59/19, 189/20 - ZFRO, 90/21, 18/23 - ZDU-10, 77/23 - odl. US in 61/24.

22 Article 1 of the Housing Act.

23 Article 87 of the Housing Act.

24 Articles 121. - 121b. of the Housing Act.

25 Articles 148, 151.a and 157 of the Housing Act.

26 Article 87(5) of the Housing Act.

27 Article 160 of the Housing Act.

28 Although migrants are in principle ineligible for non-profit housing, it is important to note that citizenship is not a prerequisite for certain accommodations offered by the Housing Fund of the Republic of Slovenia that fall outside the non-profit housing category. Under certain conditions, migrants (those holding permanent and, in some cases, temporary residence status) may apply for certain rental opportunities offered by the Housing Fund of the Republic of Slovenia (see e.g. Housing Fund of the Republic of Slovenia, 2023, Javni razpis za oddajo stanovanja v najem, p. 2-3).

29 Article 121a of the Housing Act.

they are not eligible for this type of housing. The majority of foreign nationals in Slovenia are also not eligible for housing loans and savings.³⁰

The housing of beneficiaries of international protection is (in part) regulated separately in the International Protection Act.³¹ In accordance with the said Act, beneficiaries of international protection are entitled to accommodation in an integration house or other accommodation facilities of the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants³² for a maximum period of one year from the date of acquisition of the status with the possibility of extension for 6 more months if the person attended at least 80% of the language and cultural courses and has attended a meeting with the integration adviser at least once per month.³³ They are also entitled to financial compensation for private accommodation for a period of 1 year from the date of signing the contract regarding integration activities if they do not have their own means of subsistence or if their maintenance or accommodation is not guaranteed, with the possibility of extension for one additional year if the person attended at least 80% of the language and cultural courses and has attended a meeting with the integration adviser at least once per month.³⁴ Beneficiaries of international protection are, therefore, entitled to specific financial and other housing-related assistance for a defined period.³⁵

The housing of applicants for international protection is also regulated in the International Protection Act. According to the said Act, they are placed in an asylum centre and provided with material support.³⁶ If certain conditions are met, the applicants can also relocate to a private residence.³⁷

C. Current housing challenges with a focus on the housing challenges of migrants

30 Pirc et al., 2020, Stanovanjsko področje v Sloveniji za priseljence in njihove potomce: pravna ureditev in izbrani kazalniki v praksi, p. 211-212

31 Zakon o mednarodni zaščiti, Uradni list RS, št. 16/17 - uradno prečiščeno besedilo, 54/21 in 42/23 - ZZSDT-D. It needs to be noted that the financial aid related to housing for individuals with temporary protection status is regulated separately in the Regulation on how to guarantee the rights of persons with temporary protection (Uredba o načinu zagotavljanja pravic osebam z začasno zaščito, Uradni list RS, št. 42/22, 151/22, 109/23 in 74/24), particularly in Articles 6 and 9.

32 A person must conclude a contract regarding integration activities within one month of being granted international protection to be entitled to the described benefits for the beneficiaries of international protection related to housing (Article 90 (3) of the International Protection Act).

33 Article 93 of the International Protection Act

34 Article 97 of the International Protection Act.

35 Ladić et al., 2020, Nacionalni mehanizem za evalvacijo integracije Slovenija: Poročilo za leto 2018, p. 13

36 Article 82 of the International Protection Act.

37 Article 83 of the International Protection Act.

In recent years, the general housing situation in Slovenia has become a significant concern. According to the data by the Geodetic Administration of Slovenia, the price of apartments went up by 19% in 2022 in comparison to 2021 nation-wide, with such growth being just a continuation of the trend of rising prices that has lasted for the last couple of years.³⁸ In Ljubljana in particular, the prices of apartments increased by 26% between 2014 and 2017, while the average pay increased only by 5%.³⁹ Between 2015 and 2020, the gap became even greater - the prices of apartments in Ljubljana increased by 45% while the average pay increased by only 17%.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the trend of rising rents and scarce rental housing has been exacerbated by short-term rental platforms, such as Airbnb, which reduce the supply of housing available for long-term renting and contribute to higher rents.⁴¹

In one of the surveys, conducted in the municipality of Ljubljana in 2018, almost 60% of all respondents indicated that they had to spend 30% or more of their monthly income on housing costs, while 32% of respondents reported spending more than 40% of their monthly income on housing costs.⁴² Another study further found an extreme overburdening of housing costs for low-income earners with some of them paying as much as 70% or more of their income for housing.⁴³ Given the rise in housing prices observed in recent years, it is likely that the housing cost burden for many residents has further increased since these surveys.

Access to affordable housing is further constrained due to insufficient funding provided by the state to public housing funds in Slovenia, limiting the construction of non-profit housing. As a result, only approximately 10% (1/10) of the applications of beneficiaries are granted.⁴⁴ The Public Housing Fund of the Municipality of Ljubljana (JSS MOL) has, for example, on average managed to meet only around 11% of the applications of beneficiaries for non-profit (formerly social) housing for the last 20 years.⁴⁵ As a result, JSS MOL tries to remedy the situation through market rent subsidies, the cost of which has risen steeply from 147,659 € in 2011 to 4,531,470 € in 2019.⁴⁶ Apart from representing a considerable financial burden, such subsidies do not offer a long-term solution to the housing problem; instead, they exacerbate it. Through these subsidies, it is the landlords who are

38 Geodetic Administration of the Republic of Slovenia, 2023, Poročilo o slovenskem nepremičninskem trgu za prvo polletje 2023, p. 8.

39 Institute for Housing and Spatial Studies et al., 2018, Stanovanje - sanje? Stanovanjska problematika v mestni občini Ljubljana, p. 14

40 Institute for Housing and Spatial Studies and Institute for Spatial Policies, 2021, Pregled stanovanjskega stanja v Mestni občini Ljubljana in priložnosti za razvoj stanovanjskih zadrug, p. 14

41 Obrč and Kerbler, 2020, Vpliv platforme Airbnb na dolgoročni najem stanovanj, p. 72.

42 Institute for Housing and Spatial Studies, 2018, Stanovanje - sanje? Stanovanjska problematika v mestni občini Ljubljana, p. 15

43 Institute for Housing and Spatial Studies and Institute for Spatial Policies, 2021, Pregled stanovanjskega stanja v Mestni občini Ljubljana in priložnosti za razvoj stanovanjskih zadrug, p. 17

44 Institute for Housing and Spatial Studies and Institute for Spatial Policies, 2021, Vprašanja za stanovanja: Tegobe in želje iskalcev stanovanj ter priložnosti za stanovanjsko združništvo, p. 2

45 Institute for Housing and Spatial Studies and Institute for Spatial Policies, 2021, Pregled stanovanjskega stanja v Mestni občini Ljubljana in priložnosti za razvoj stanovanjskih zadrug, p. 22

46 Ibid., p. 25

effectively being subsidized,⁴⁷ while at the same time, the subsidies allow rents on the market to remain high and continue to rise.

The trend of high housing prices, especially rents, can have a particularly adverse impact on migrants, as third-country nationals are not eligible for non-profit housing or market rent subsidies, and according to a 2022 report by the European Central Bank, immigrants in the EU earn, on average, about 30% less than native-born citizens.⁴⁸ This is in line with data from 2018, which indicates that nearly 21% of third-country nationals in Slovenia experienced a housing cost burden, compared to just 4,3% of Slovenian nationals.⁴⁹

On top of the issue of high housing prices, 22.7% of the population in Slovenia is reported to be living in housing deprivation (living in an apartment with a leaking roof, damp floors, walls, foundations or rotting window frames or floors), which is well above the EU average of 13.9%.⁵⁰ It is important to note that the percentage of the population living in substandard housing is on average higher among migrants both at the national (Slovenian) level (28.5% of migrants) and at the EU level (24.5% of migrants).⁵¹ Compared to the EU average, there is also a significant disparity between the percentage of the native population and that of migrants living in overcrowded housing. In Slovenia, the proportion of migrants living in overcrowded conditions is more than double that of the native population.⁵² Data from 2018 further shows that average migrant households were 5,8% smaller compared to the Slovenian average.⁵³

In addition to the aforementioned, it is important to note that the standard of living of migrants is usually lower than that of the rest of the population, particularly when they first come to a new country. This is primarily linked to exclusion from the housing system, as migrants are not familiar with the language and face prejudice.⁵⁴ Migrants often experience housing discrimination as many people are not prepared to rent their properties to migrants, particularly those with large families.⁵⁵ In one survey, 32.5% of migrant respondents pointed out various difficulties in buying or renting an apartment in Slovenia. The most common problems included discrimination on the

47 Ibid.

48 Dossche et al., 2022, Immigrants and the Distribution of Income and Wealth in the Euro Area: First Facts and Implications for Monetary Policy, p. 5

49 Includ-EU, n.d., Housing in Slovenia, URL: <https://includeu.eu/housing-in-slovenia/>.

50 Dragoš, 2022, Revščina in univerzalni temeljni dohodek, p. 282

51 Pirc et al., 2020, Stanovanjsko področje v Sloveniji za priseljence in njihove potomce: pravna ureditev in izbrani kazalniki v praksi, p. 222-223

52 Ibid., p. 215

53 Includ-EU, n.d., Housing in Slovenia, URL: <https://includeu.eu/housing-in-slovenia/> and Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2019, Od 250.000 prebivalcev Slovenije s prvim prebivališčem v tujini se jih je 38 % k nam priselilo v zadnjih 10 letih, URL: <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/news/Index/8554>.

54 Filipovič Hrast, 2005, Stanovanjski vidik izključenosti migrantov v Sloveniji, p. 100

55 International Organization for Migration, 2021, Includ-EU. Regional and Local Expertise, Exchange and Engagement for Enhanced Social Cohesion in Europe: Housing, p. 16

grounds of ethnic origin or poor use of the Slovenian language, as well as high housing costs and poor-quality housing.⁵⁶

With regard to the beneficiaries of international protection, it needs to be emphasised that the National Mechanism for the Evaluation of Integration found that, apart from facing racism and discrimination, their main housing challenges include the insufficient capacity of integration houses and financial difficulties in renting apartments. These financial difficulties arise largely because beneficiaries of international protection typically have to wait more than a month, sometimes up to two months, for financial assistance after their status is recognised, while landlords usually require a security deposit and at least one month's rent in advance.⁵⁷ Furthermore, potential landlords are hesitant to rent to beneficiaries of international protection as they need a rental contract, which must contain the actual cost of the rent. In practice, many landlords either rent properties without formal rental contracts or list a lower rent in the contract to avoid paying taxes. At the same time, some landlords take advantage of the precarious situation of the beneficiaries of international protection by renting them apartments in poor condition for high prices.⁵⁸

D. Empirical analysis

a) Interviews with migrants

To examine the practical implications of the housing challenges faced by migrants, as previously identified, and to elucidate their personal experiences with housing, we conducted a series of interviews in February and March 2024. The study involved eight migrant participants: three women (two living independently and one residing with family) and five men (two living independently and three cohabiting with a partner or with family). The demographic composition of the participants included three individuals from Syria, two from Palestine (Gaza), one from the USA (of Mexican descent), one from Iran, and one from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The interviews lasted approximately 30 - 45 minutes and were systematically structured around 18 questions that explored the participants' backgrounds, their current and previous housing conditions, and their views on the involvement of migrants in housing policy discussions and improvements in Slovenia.⁵⁹ They were conducted primarily in English, with the assistance of an Arabic-speaking interpreter for participants with limited proficiency in English. The interview with the participant from Bosnia and Herzegovina was conducted in Slovenian.

⁵⁶ Pirc et al., 2020, Stanovanjsko področje v Sloveniji za priseljence in njihove potomce: pravna ureditev in izbrani kazalniki v praksi, p. 211-212

⁵⁷ Ladić et al., 2020, Nacionalni mehanizem za evalvacijo integracije Slovenija: Poročilo za leto 2018, p. 15-16

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ For the questionnaire used in the interviews see Appendix 1.

Table 1: The housing experiences of the participants

Participant	Size of the rented room/apartment	Housing - related problems	Household net income spent on housing costs (per month)	No. of relocations while in Slovenia	Issues when trying to find housing
No. 1	Not disclosed (one room for three people)	High rent and utility costs Apartment that is far away from the workplace Difficulties with the internet signal Overcrowding (three people living in one room)	45 %	One time in 7 years	Discrimination due to being a foreigner and a refugee
No. 2	28 m2 (for one person); before living in the current apartment: 18 m2	High rent and utility costs Overcrowding Poor living conditions (no kitchen)	50 % - 60 %	Three times in 6 years Homeless for two months	Discrimination due to being a foreigner and having social support
No. 3	40 m2 (for one person)	Lack of the feeling of independence due to living with (and renting from) a friend	50 % - 60 %	Three times in 14 years	Lack of knowledge about renting Difficulties finding affordable and comfortable housing
No. 4	Not disclosed (one room in a shared apartment)	High rent and utility costs	85 % - 90 %	0 in 2 years	None (was helped by an NGO)
No. 5	62 m2 (for 6 people),	High rent and utility costs	65 % - 70 %	Five times in 6 years	Discrimination due to being a

	before living in the current apartment: 30 m2	Overcrowding (six people living in one room) Poor living conditions (old apartment)			foreigner and having more children
No. 6	32 m2 (for two people)	High rent and utility costs	50 % - 60 %	Four times in five years	Discrimination due to being a foreigner Difficulties finding an apartment that is affordable and comfortable
No. 7	21 m2 (for one person)	Poor living conditions (not enough light, moisture, old apartment)	50 %	Multiple times (exact number not disclosed) Homeless for some time in between	None
No. 8	62 m2 (for five people)	Overcrowding Having only a short-term rental contract High rent and utility costs	50 % - 60 %	Three times in 4 years	Discrimination due to being a foreigner and having a large family

Most of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with their current housing situation as they face one or more serious issues related to housing. The issue that was mentioned the most was high rent and utility costs, which correlates to the fact that all of them spend more than 45 % of their net income per month for housing costs, with the majority of them paying 50 - 60 % or more.

Other issues the participants mentioned were overcrowding, poor living conditions (not enough light, moisture, old apartment, no kitchen in the apartment etc.), having only a short term rental contract and lack of the feeling of independence due to living with (and renting from) a friend.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ In relation to overcrowding, it is important to note that most of the participants live in a room/apartment that has a below average usable floor area per person (see Table 1), as according to the data for 2021, the average usable floor area per person in Slovenia is 29,6 m2 (Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2022, Stanovanja, 1. januar 2021, URL:

One of the participants, who is living with his wife and his child in only one room, expressed difficulties due to overcrowding, saying:

“When we are looking at furniture, my kid says, “I would like this bed for me.” Where would I put this bed? Where? I don’t have space.”

He continued:

“My dream is just to have an apartment with two rooms. One for my kid and another for my wife and me.”

Another participant, who was previously living in a small room with no basic equipment noted:

“I had nothing. No kitchen, no bed, nothing. ... I had to wash the dishes in the bathroom.”

In addition to encountering challenges in relation to housing conditions, the majority of the participants also had to move multiple times within a couple of years of being in Slovenia (at some point, two of them were even homeless) and have faced discrimination due to being foreigners, refugees and/or having multiple children when trying to find an apartment.

One of the participants, who has a refugee status noted:

“Some people are good, but most of them, when they hear you are a refugee...it’s tough.”

Another participant articulated the challenges she encountered while attempting to find somewhere to live, saying:

“Two months I was homeless, two months I tried to find a room. ... No one helped.”

She continued:

“People don’t want to rent to people who do not have a job and I have social support. Also, people are scared if you are not from here or from ex-Yugoslavia.”

The participants also encountered several other issues in their efforts to secure housing, including lack of knowledge about the apartment search process and difficulties in finding affordable and comfortable accommodation.

A participant who is currently renting from a friend and sharing her residence, expressed a desire for independent living and highlighted the challenge of finding accommodation where she could live by herself:

“Every time I wanted to rent by myself ... I first did not know how to do it. ... I saw it was so difficult. ... Every time I try to find another place I cannot.”

Only two participants did not have issues when trying to find accommodation (one of them was helped by an NGO and the other one has Slovenian citizenship and has been living in Slovenia since he was a child).

All participants emphasised that the housing situation of migrants is not being recognised enough and expressed willingness to participate and engage more in the changes of the housing policy in Slovenia. One participant emphasized the urgent need for effective communication with relevant stakeholders to address and resolve the current housing situation of migrants, saying:

»We need to make a community together, to send a message from migrants to the ministry or something like that, to tell them what exactly is the problem and to find a solution so that the future will be more normal for everyone. ... Not just a meeting, an interview, but to do something more, to make a contact so that people will be able to build something good here in the future.«

Another participant noted:

“Things such as this interview should be more public for all people, for the ministry, to tell them that we are normal people who are looking for a good future here, because of the war or something else, and that we are looking to build something here and do something good.”

b) Interviews with experts

To gain further insight into the overall housing situation in Slovenia, we also conducted interviews with two experts in May 2024.

The first interview was conducted with Ms. Sanja Jablanović, a lawyer from The Legal Centre for Human Right and the Environment (PIC) whose focus is, *inter alia*, providing legal aid to tenants. We primarily discussed the problems and rights violations faced by tenants as well as housing inaccessibility and the ways in which it could be addressed.

Regarding tenant awareness of their rights, Ms. Jablanović emphasised that such awareness and knowledge of rights varies and stressed the ongoing need for more comprehensive information dissemination as tenants are generally not sufficiently aware of their rights. She also highlighted that many individuals are unaware that certain tenant rights are legally protected and cannot be waived in rental contracts. Ms. Jablanović further explained the significant challenges tenants face, including the absence of rental contracts or inadequately detailed contracts, failure to recover security deposits, landlords making frequent unannounced visits, and disputes over maintenance costs. She also noted the difficulties tenants face in securing rental accommodations, highlighting that it is even more challenging for foreign nationals, especially those without legal status or with recently acquired status, who may encounter discrimination from landlords when seeking housing.

In relation to migrants, she also emphasised that there can be instances where employers, who provide housing, exercise landlord authority and evict tenants (migrant workers) at their discretion.

Ms. Jablanović pointed out that in her view the main issue related to housing is the absence of a (cohesive) housing policy. Furthermore, ownership is widely perceived as the ultimate security, while rentals are commonly viewed as temporary for tenants and profitable for landlords. She explained that this dynamic defines our rental system, profoundly influencing the rental market, with widespread aspiration among individuals to become property owners.

According to Ms. Jablanović, the focus of the new housing policy should be on housing accessibility, which also includes safe housing and continuity of rental agreements. She emphasised that the protection of rental relationships must be ensured in a faster and more accessible manner and that there needs to be a quick, efficient, and accessible process to enforce rights and address issues such as unreturned deposits, which currently face protracted legal proceedings. Ms. Jablanović further expressed the need to discuss limiting the amounts for security deposits and rent, and the need to establish a reliable registry for rental agreements. She further emphasised that establishing a robust non-profit housing system while also regulating the commercial rental market is crucial.

With regard to ensuring greater participation of different social groups in the creation and implementation of housing policy, Ms. Jablanović emphasised the importance of fostering participation through dialogue. She highlighted the necessity for the state to initiate and listen to such dialogue, emphasising that successful policy development requires a clear understanding of practical circumstances and public expectations. Ms. Jablanović also highlighted that a good policy addresses everyone and that specific mechanisms for the most vulnerable are required to ensure a sufficient level of social security and equality.

The second interview was conducted with Mr. Aidan Cerar, a sociologist and project manager from the Institute for Spatial Policies (IPoP). We discussed particularly the issues related to housing inaccessibility, gentrification and the question of participation in housing policy and urban design.

Mr. Cerar highlighted several critical issues related to housing during the interview. He noted the absence of a (cohesive) housing policy and explained that in his view the main issue related to housing is the inaccessibility of housing, which manifests in both the real-estate market and the rental market. On the real estate market, this is evident in high property prices, while on the rental market, it is reflected in a power imbalance favouring landlords due to housing shortages, which leaves tenants very vulnerable. Mr. Cerar also emphasised the significance of family background and financial support in acquiring first-time homeownership, highlighting the difficulties faced by individuals without such networks, such as migrants.

Regarding possible solutions to the current housing crisis, Mr. Cerar emphasized the importance of building public rental housing. He also expressed the need for housing funds to adopt a more ambitious approach to land acquisition, aiming to secure larger plots for the development of neighbourhoods, which he believes will enrich urban public life. Mr. Cerar further stressed that a stable national funding source and increased state budget allocations for housing provision are needed.

In the interview, we also discussed gentrification and its impacts. Mr. Cerar explained that gentrification involves higher social classes pushing out lower social classes in terms of space, which often results in displacement. He noted that gentrified cities are also becoming more generic as they adapt to cater to tourists who spend money quickly, a phenomenon known as touristification. He explained that, in his opinion, signs of gentrification can be observed in Ljubljana as well, though displacement is less pronounced due to higher homeownership rates. He highlighted the increasing number of tourist visits and how the city is increasingly adapting to them. He stressed, however, that there is limited data about gentrification and its effects in Ljubljana and that closer monitoring is needed.

Regarding community participation in housing, Mr. Cerar emphasised the importance of understanding residents' satisfaction and their perspectives on living in newly built public housing neighbourhoods. He further highlighted the importance of incorporating community-building activities into the neighbourhood design by providing spaces (e.g. playgrounds) that encourage repeated social interactions among residents, which he sees as a crucial factor that can turn a neighbourhood into a community.

In summary, both interviewees identified significant issues regarding housing in Slovenia, including the absence of a cohesive housing policy and the inaccessibility of housing. They also emphasised the need for additional public housing and other measures to improve the housing situation in the country.

E. Conclusion

Theoretical and empirical insights show that migrants in Slovenia face numerous housing issues, which are further exacerbated by the overall housing situation in the country. Migrants are mostly excluded from the state's measures that address the housing issues of the socially disadvantaged, such as non-profit housing and rent subsidies, while also facing immense challenges when trying to acquire affordable and quality housing, particularly high rents, poor living conditions and discrimination. Given these issues, the housing situation of migrants needs to be addressed

seriously, particularly because inadequate housing can lead to social exclusion and negatively impact integration.⁶¹

One of the relevant studies suggests that coordination between local and national governments through coherent housing policies and programmes can play a crucial role in addressing access to housing and integration and that active participation of migrants in the planning and implementation of housing projects and in housing management is crucial. Some suggested strategies include training and employment of migrants in housing services, awareness raising regarding the housing benefits they are entitled to and creating advisory groups for housing projects.⁶²

Such strategies and other practices could be highly beneficial in addressing the housing situation of migrants in Slovenia. However, it is crucial to recognize that, without concrete systemic measures to ensure housing accessibility, merely integrating migrants into existing schemes would likely have a minimal impact. Therefore, a broader structural approach to addressing the general housing crisis in Slovenia is likely necessary.

61 NGO Network of Integration Focal Points, n.d., Policy Briefing on Housing for Refugees and Migrants in Europe, p. 2

62 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2021, Housing for Migrants and Refugees in the UNECE Region. Challenges and Practices, p. ix

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Appendix 1: List of questions for the interviewed third-country nationals

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) Where are you from?
- 4) What type of residence permit do you have?
- 5) Do you have family here? When were you reunited with your family? How many family members are there in your household?
- 6) For how long have you been living in Slovenia? Do you live in Ljubljana?
- 7) How long have you been renting? Are you renting a house, an apartment or a room?
- 8) On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with your current housing situation?
- 9) What is the biggest challenge concerning your current housing situation?
- 10) Are you experiencing (or have you ever experienced) any of the following housing-related problems?
 - High rent and utility costs.
 - Too small a flat for the whole family, overcrowding.
 - Poor conditions (old flat, windows, old furniture, plague).
 - Renting a place that is far from public transport.
- 11) Approximately how much net income per month do you and your family spend on housing costs in total (rent and utilities combined)?
- 12) Has your housing situation changed during your stay in Slovenia? In what way and how often have you moved?
- 13) Was it difficult to find accommodation? Have you ever experienced discrimination or other problems when trying to find accommodation and if, in what way?
- 14) How do the housing problems you experience affect other parts of your life and the life of your family?
- 15) What do you think is the biggest obstacle that non-citizens in Slovenia face when trying to find accommodation (e.g. rent a flat)?
- 16) Do you think that non-citizens in Slovenia should be involved in the development and implementation of the housing policy in Slovenia?

17) In what ways do you believe relevant actors could effectively involve non-citizens in the formulation and implementation of housing policy? Do you feel that your housing challenges are adequately recognized by those in a position to address them?

18) Who helped you when you were trying to find accommodation to rent?