

Knowledge of the Slovenian language is a requirement for important administrative procedures. We must prove our language skills when renewing permanent and temporary residence permits, applying for citizenship and registering as a jobseeker with the Employment Service of Slovenia (ZRSZ). Language proficiency at higher levels is a prerequisite for professions such as medicine. While we observe our obligations, we also recognise that administrative language requirements can be discriminatory if they do not consider the life circumstances of people with a migratory background. In particular, if the language courses available don't meet our needs.

We highlight the two administrative requirements concerning reunited family members and jobseekers registered with the Employment Service of Slovenia as particularly problematic. When renewing a temporary residence permit, reunited family members are required to submit a certificate of Slovenian language proficiency at a survival level, which, following the adoption of the amendment to the Law on Foreigners, replaced the A1 language proficiency requirement. When the Law on Foreigners was amended last year, several NGOs working on migration identified the A1 language proficiency requirement as unviable and discriminatory, especially for women. The new survival language level is also controversial because it is loosely defined and, above all, it represents additional administrative work.

The requirement that foreigners must pass an A1 language exam within 1 year to be registered as a jobseeker with the Employment Service of Slovenia also represents a level of social risk and exclusion for people with a migrant background. Registration with the employment service is linked to the right to social assistance. This is an important source of income for vulnerable groups of foreigners, such as unemployed el-

derly women, because foreigners in Slovenia are not entitled to rent subsidies. At the same time, most foreigners in Slovenia can't acquire ownership of real estate – which is why we usually live in rented accommodation. As job seekers, we need social security, which should not depend on proof of language skills.

However, if there are language requirements for reunited family members and job seekers, then free and intensive Slovenian language courses should be provided immediately or at least 3 months after arrival in Slovenia, taking into account the students' mother tongues, i.e. offering more hours for non-Slavic languages.

Systemic weaknesses in the integration of people with a migratory background need to be addressed and resolved in dialogue with migrant women and men. Slovenia needs to ensure faster and better quality integration procedures, which can be achieved by addressing the shortcomings in language learning. We are convinced that without systemic changes in the areas highlighted in this public initiative, Slovenia isn't ensuring and promoting the integration of people with a migratory background into society.

WE CAN ONLY CHANGE THIS TOGETHER – LET'S START TODAY!

The public initiative was prepared by migrants within the BODE+ project in cooperation with ADRA Slovenia, the Association Medkulturni dialog, and the Cultural Association Gmajna and with the support of the project GEtCoheSive.



ENABLE FASTER INCLUSION: PUBLIC INITIATIVE AND PETITION TO IMPROVE SLOVENIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAMMES FOR FOREIGNERS

We, migrant women and men living in Slovenia advocate for more effective systemic integration practices. We have developed 12 DEMANDS that address the challenges of integrating persons with a migrant background into society, focusing on improving Slovenian language learning programmes for foreigners.

In 2023, 244,923 people from 176 countries, five continents and a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds held permanent or temporary residence permits in Slovenia. We are an important part of Slovenian society, enriching and diversifying it. Language skills enable us to engage with the local population, deal with administrative procedures, increase our employability, benefit from health services, support school children, be competitive tenants and participate in the political process. In this way, we become an independent and active part of society, thus strengthening social cohesion.

Linguistic integration is a core component of the government's Strategy for Integrating non-EU Nationals into the Cultural, Economic and Social Life of the Republic of Slovenia prepared by the Ministry of the Interior and adopted by the government in November 2023. The strategy recognises proficiency in the Slovenian language as a prerequisite for foreigners' successful and effective integration into Slovenian society. It foresees the renewal of publicly valid programmes, the establishment of new language learning programmes, the monitoring of the quality of the programmes and an increase in the number of hours and staff delivering the programmes.

While we welcome the ambition of the government's integration strategy, we wonder whether it will work in practice, especially in light of the insufficient structural support for the delivery of courses and examinations. There are operational areas for improvement in the education of foreigners. These are linked to the need for more professional staff, training centres and support services. To what extent has the Ministry of the Interior consulted people with a migratory background in preparing and implementing the strategy? Will the measures envisaged successfully address our needs? Has the government already started implementing the measures – and if so, which ones?

Our requests for improving the Slovenian language learning programmes for foreigners are detailed in 12 DEMANDS, which will accelerate the integration process making it more efficient. Our demands draw attention to the systemic shortcomings in Slovenian language learning that we are facing.



1.

Fast-track integration. Access and referral to start language courses should be faster. We want to begin with Slovenian language courses soon after arrival in Slovenia. Some of us have waited for 1 year or more (in some cases up to 4 years) for a place to become available.

2.

Scope of the courses. We call for an hour increase in Slovenian language courses, especially for people from non-Slavic linguistic backgrounds. Persons arriving from the Arab world, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Latin America, non-Slavic speaking EU countries, etc. need a higher number of hours to reach the same level of Slovenian as people from Slavic language backgrounds (Bosnia, Serbia, North Macedonia, Russia, etc.). Studies have found that people from different language backgrounds need different numbers of hours to achieve comparable results. This is also confirmed by experience in the profession. According to the Foreign Service Institute, an English speaker will need 1100 hours to learn a Slavic language such as Slovenian, compared with 600 hours for Romance languages closer to English, such as French and Portuguese. EU member states with good integration practices, such as Germany, offer more language hours to refugees and other foreigners. Germany has an integration programme with 600 to 900 hours for the language part and 400 hours for fast learners. People from non-Slavic backgrounds are often not literate in the Latin alphabet, our mother tongues are often not Indo-European, we come from a different linguistic paradigm, and we need more hours – at least 1000 hours – to achieve comparable results with speakers of languages closer to Slovenian.

3.

Size and composition of groups. Small and homogeneous groups should be formed. Some groups are too large and heterogeneous, slowing down the learning process. In the courses, the learners' proficiency in Slovenian often varies, and we also come from different language backgrounds. The group size should be small, with students from a similar language background and an equivalent proficiency level in the language to be learned. People from Slavic and non-Slavic language backgrounds should be placed in appropriate groups. Other factors such as gender, age, level of education, and length of stay in Slovenia should also be considered when forming groups.

4.

Better designed learning programmes. We call for more emphasis on conversation and practice that includes social contact with natural speakers of Slovenian. Contact with the living language is crucial for language learning. Courses should devote more time to conversations with Slovenian citizens. We call for additional hours and spaces, dedicated to practising conversation with native speakers of Slovenian, such as community centres, intensive (summer) camps, tea and reading circles. Here immigrants can meet the local population and thus use the living language.

5.

More hours for revision and exam preparation. Courses should offer more hours for revision and preparation for the language exam. In addition, there needs to be more textbooks and other materials for revision and exam preparation.

6.

Improved and more varied range of literature and materials. We need additional free materials for language learning, such as fiction and other books in Slovenian that correspond to the different levels of language proficiency, e.g. a variety of books for levels A1, A2, and B1. We also need more audio, video and multimedia materials to learn Slovenian at different levels, such as podcasts, puzzles, grammar games, apps, etc. Motivational content of this kind supports and simplifies the learning process.

7.

Intensity and continuity of courses. The intervals between courses are too long. To retain the knowledge acquired regular exposure to listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar of the language we are learning is needed. Lessons should be held at least 4 times a week and include educational excursions to cultural and natural places of interest in Slovenia, such as various institutions, museums, the parliament, hills, and lakes where we can learn the Slovenian language related to specific locations.

8.

More free courses for higher language levels (B1, B2, C1, C2) and professional language courses. We need free professional language courses on flexible dates. In-depth language skills are important for people with higher education and professional skills who want to work in Slovenia in the profession for which we are trained. We need professional language skills to perform our professions. For example, the Medical Chamber of Slovenia requires Slovenian language proficiency for doctors at B2 written and C1 oral. The textbook used to prepare for the professional medical language test already requires proficiency at the advanced A2/B1 levels.

9.

Tailored courses for the elderly. Older people need tailored courses to suit their needs. Practice shows that it is harder for older people to learn a new language, but for us too, language skills are crucial for independent integration into society. Without language skills, we are at increased risk of social exclusion.

10.

Adapted course dates for employed persons. The employed can't attend courses during the workweek. Course dates must be flexible and on dates, for example in the afternoon and evening, when we can attend. Employers should be encouraged to offer Slovenian lessons to employees.

11.

Presence of cultural mediators and translators. Cultural mediators and translators should be involved in the educational process. They contribute to effective teaching when students speak only their native language and to understanding and respect for cultural differences.

12.

Information on available courses. Information on courses offered by adult education centres, selected contractors, NGOs, and others should be more easily accessible and collected in one place.