



Embrace



PARTICIPATORY PROCESS WITH NEWCOMERS IN LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

2022-2023



ZRC SAZU

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WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS BOOKLET

This Booklet combines the participatory experience of 29 newcomers and 5 decision-makers from the Municipality of Ljubljana, under the project "Embrace", which took place from October 2022 until March 2023.

This document is divided into four main chapters. The first one, "About the Project", gives an overview of the Embrace project and the three phases of this participatory process with newcomers: Listening Sessions, Face-to-Face Meetings, and Co-Projecting Workshops.

The second chapter "Newcomers' Experiences and Recommendations" presents what was shared by the newcomers in the Listening Sessions and Face-to-Face Meeting regarding their integration into Ljubljana. It is organized by themes and starts with an introductory text that combines testimonials from the newcomers and tries to be as faithful as possible to their contributions. It is followed by the main recommendations for better practice, presented in bullet points.

Lastly, illustrative newcomers' quotes are shown in dark red boxes, while relevant inputs from the practitioners regarding the same theme are presented in light red boxes.

From all the information collected and presented to decision-makers by the newcomers, the third chapter, "Creation of a Collaborative Solution", showcases the last phase of the process, the Co-Projecting Workshops. After a collaborative decision on the topic to focus on, this part of the Booklet exposes the ideating process that resulted in two co-created solutions for Access to Housing, elaborated by newcomers, practitioners, and decision-makers together.

The Booklet ends with a last chapter that presents a sample of "Testimonials from Participants", collected during and after the activities.

The information presented in this material intends to inspire decision-makers and practitioners who regularly work for or with newcomers to see the added value and unique perspective that comes from involving them in the decision-making processes.

It also aims to share main experiences and recommendations regarding the main topics of integration, with a focus on Slovenian language learning, which can be useful for the definition and/or improvement of policies and programs that are created to promote newcomers' integration.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Participatory Process with Newcomers is part of the European project "Embrace - Empowering Migrants to Be Representative Actors in Community Engagement", funded by AMIF. It has been implemented simultaneously in 11 cities in 6 European countries, in 2022-2023.

Using ComParte's methodology, it aimed at involving newcomers in the decision-making process of the topics that directly affect them and their integration into the country.

This booklet compiles the knowledge collected during the participatory process, in the three main phases presented on the following pages: Listening Sessions, Face-to-Face Meeting and Co-Projecting Workshops.

It intends to be a working tool for decision-makers and practitioners, using the lived experiences of the newcomers to make better-informed and efficient decisions when defining integration policies, aligned with the beneficiaries' real needs.

NEWCOMERS INVOLVED:

27 newcomers, 55% female, from Afghanistan, Syria, Turkey, Russia, Albania, Gambia, Kazakhstan, Ethiopia, Palestine and Congo.

DECISION-MAKERS/PRACTITIONERS INVOLVED:

5 decision-makers/practitioners from:

- Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants
- Employment Service of Slovenia
- Intercultural Dialogue Association
- Centre for Social Work of Republic of Slovenia
- Center of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education



STEP 1. LISTENING SESSIONS

Listening Sessions are informal moments where, through creative and participatory methodologies, newcomers share their experiences and recommendations for better integration in the municipality, inspired by what went well and what could have been better in their situation. Between October and November 2022, 2 Listening Sessions were implemented with 27 newcomers in total. The trainer used an icebreaker to spark a discussion on different starting positions and how society sometimes expects the same results from people with different backgrounds, social statuses and economic opportunities. The icebreaker was meant to show newcomers that trainers are aware of this bias and therefore sensitive and open to different kinds of expression. This was the starting point of the conversation that explored in detail their insights on what could be changed and maintained for better integration in the city of Ljubljana.

STEP 2.

FACE-TO-FACE MEETING

In the Face-to-Face Meeting, that took place in January 2023, 2 newcomers shared their experiences and recommendations directly with 1 decision-maker and practitioner. It's an opportunity for this information to be shared first-hand, in a direct and personal way, giving space for a dialogue between all the participants to clarify ideas and perceptions. The newcomers share their insights during most of the meeting, while the decision-makers actively listen to them, giving feedback on how newcomers' experiences and recommendations resonate with and impact their work. Taking place in an informal setting, this meeting is an opportunity to create proximity and trust between newcomers and decision-makers. The main topics of the meeting in Ljubljana were the difficulty to access the labor market and the difficulty to obtain regular employment contracts, as well as the inability to directly influence policy changes that are necessary for better and easier integration.



STEP 3.

CO-PROJECTING WORKSHOPS

Co-Projecting Workshops use a Participatory Policy Design methodology, tested in several countries in northern Europe, which allows the use of design to create concrete solutions that make sense for the beneficiaries, based on the challenges faced by the public sector and associated partners that were mapped in the Listening Sessions and Face-to-Face Meeting.

In March 2023, the Co-Projecting Workshop took place at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Art as an intensive collaboration between all stakeholders (6 newcomers, 5 practitioners/decision-makers) with a practical, relaxed, and creative approach.

In the end, the participants arrived collaboratively at a common solution to improve the learning process and the use of Slovene language for newcomers in the Municipality of Ljubljana.

NEWCOMERS' EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During Listening Sessions and Face-to-Face Meeting, newcomers shared their experiences and recommendations about many different aspects of their integration in Ljubljana. The following pages present their contributions, systematized and organized by theme. It starts with an introductory text that combines testimonials from the newcomers, followed by the main recommendations in bullet points, and relevant quotes from newcomers and from decision-makers/practitioners.

LANGUAGE

We see major systemic problems in learning the Slovenian language. We come from different language groups, but everyone is offered the same teaching method. In addition, the courses are too short, and providers (language schools) often lack the skills to teach adult newcomers. After this short course, we do not have the opportunity to upgrade our knowledge in the local environment, as the language skills of many do not meet the criteria of employers despite having passed the language exam. We need to have access to a workplace, where we could actively use the language and improve our communication skills.

- The number of hours of free courses should at least double and the quality of free courses must be upgraded.
- Language courses should be adapted to different levels of proficiency and language groups.
- The courses could be more flexible with timing, perhaps also on weekends.
- The exam should be free of charge.

“The class was really hard for me and I felt like the teacher was not giving me enough attention and support.”
- Newcomer

“We were too many in the class, we never had a conversation, it was only written exercises.”
- Newcomer

“Since language classes are too crowded and newcomers have different language proficiency levels, the learning experience is very generic and not personalized”.
- Practitioner



EDUCATION AND WORK

It is hard to validate our formal and informal professional experience and we only get employed in low-paid physical work. This is also related to strict conditions regarding the knowledge of the Slovenian language. In Slovenia, there are almost no adjustments of language skills according to different types of jobs, which means that many highly educated newcomers work in jobs that require a lower level of education, as their knowledge of the Slovenian language is not perfect, even though they may not need perfect knowledge of the language for their work.

- They should provide jobs that are more suited to our skills and education.
- It should be easier to verify the education documents.
- Asylum seekers should get access to the labor market immediately, not after 9 months.

“It is very unfair that the Slovene language is obligatory to get employment when you can do lots of work without talking or talking in English”.
- Newcomer

“They should not require such high language knowledge for most jobs, people are struggling with money and they can’t get employed even if they want to because of language”. - Newcomer

“Many newcomers have skills that would benefit Slovenian society, but they cannot demonstrate them due to lack of formal education.”
- Practitioner

HOUSING

It is impossible to get an apartment in Ljubljana, the rents are skyrocketing. And even if you have money, there are not enough available flats. We have to hide that we are foreigners when we speak to a potential landlord. And even if we manage to get a space, the landlord does not want to give us an official contract in order to avoid taxation. So we pay cash every month and we can't register our address, therefore landing in the black market. They say we should move to a smaller town to have lower rent, but there are fewer jobs outside of Ljubljana and people are even less tolerant of foreigners. The asylum home is overcrowded, the facilities are very basic and the security is very strict. It's almost like a prison.

- They should expand the capacities of existing integration houses and build new ones. Also they should prolong the time that you can stay there, especially for vulnerable people.
- We should start a housing cooperative and demand more funds for homeless shelters.
- Slovenia should stop behaving like a transit country and expand the facilities and services for asylum seekers.

“The housing market in Ljubljana is racist, when they hear I'm a foreigner they stop returning my calls”.
- Newcomer

“Refugees should have the right to access social housing, not just citizens. Rent subsidies for people with international protection should be prolonged to two years or until people manage to find employment. There is no use of refugee status if you are homeless and without an income”. - Newcomer

“They should close the detention facility in the asylum home and get more sensitive security that is trained to work with vulnerable groups”. - Practitioner

CREATION OF A COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION

Throughout a very intensive and dynamic day, 6 newcomers and 5 decision-makers and practitioners worked together to create a collaborative solution for one of the main challenges of integration in the Municipality of Ljubljana. Both decision-makers and newcomers decided to focus on Slovenian language. They agreed that language is a key factor for integration and quality of life in a new environment, which is why it is necessary to provide good conditions for language learning on a systemic level, adapted to different groups of newcomers. At the end of the day, this was the co-created solution that was prototyped by the group:



SOLUTION

“We are building a volunteer-based language exchange service in the form of a public program, which includes the opportunity for newcomers to be matched to students or retired citizens to get a 1:1 language learning experience, for an hour a week for 6 months. Newcomers are automatically registered as part of their language classes, as this service complements official classes with a more profound and personal learning experience that goes beyond language to include culture. “

How did the group arrive at this solution?

Identifying the root cause of the problem

Ideating key features and possible solutions for the problem

Prototyping the selected solution

Identifying the root cause of the problem

Throughout the first phase of the Co-Projecting Workshop, the participants identified different causes that contributed to the lack of quality language learning for newcomers. By organizing and clustering them, they can be summed up in these three thematic areas:

- Lack of good language courses for newcomers that are free, flexible and personalized
- Lack of good working conditions for practitioners due to the need of reducing the number of pupils per class and prioritising quality over price on public tenders
- Lack of a more adaptive and practice-based link between language skills and access to work

Taking into consideration all the information shared, the participants were invited to create a "How might we" statement, that would guide the process of creating a collaborative solution.

"HOW MIGHT WE" STATEMENT

"How might we design language learning experiences that take into account newcomers' language proficiency and interests, so that newcomers have a more relevant and personalized learning experience and dropout rates get lower?"

Ideating key features and possible solutions for the problem

The work continued in two groups: one group consisted of decision-makers, one of newcomers. We asked both groups to discuss with each other and point out key features, important for the creation of a solution to the identified problem. In the third part, we combined both groups. They presented the highlighted ideas to other participants and gradually summarised key solution components:

- Prevention of early drop-out
- Reduction of costs in time and money for providers
- Adaptation of learning content to levels of proficiency and language groups
- Personal approach: focus, attention and support of individuals
- Reducing the number of pupils in classes
- Free exams
- Intercultural exchange





Ideating key features and possible solutions for the problem

The process continued by writing down the key features of the service they would like to prototype:

1. It's free for everyone
2. It's based on recruiting volunteers
3. Volunteers might be students interested in learning the language of the newcomer (language tandem) or retired citizens who might be experiencing loneliness
4. It can happen anywhere, not necessarily in a formal learning setting
5. It's not just about learning the language: cultural exchange is key! .

The group kept adding ideas on post-its. After the brainstorming, the group clustered them and discussed what were the underlying issues in those clusters:

- a) Pairing people with community members
- b) The need for individual conversations, and
- c) The importance of having learning opportunities outside class.

The group decided to prototype the idea to make language learning more personalized by pairing newcomers with other citizens, so that they can have a 1:1 learning experience that also feels more personalized.

The facilitator proposed different tools that the group could use to give more shape to this idea. The group decided to use a 'Storyboard'.



Prototyping the selected solution

- 1 Create a multidisciplinary team that brings together different organizations.
- 2 Create a profile on social media to inform newcomers and citizens about this possibility.
- 3 Create a flyer with basic information and contact number for senior citizens, distribute them in retirement houses.
- 4 Create a pool of interested newcomers and citizens. Create a "match" and offer support during the process.
- 5 Disseminate positive experiences.

SOLUTION STATEMENT

Slovenian language courses should be free, of high quality and continue without interruptions. They should also be longer. Providers should be qualified to teach newcomers and have experience working in intercultural environments. Groups should be small so that teachers can devote maximum attention to the participants. When forming groups, newcomers' prior knowledge of the Slovenian language and the language group of their mother tongue should be considered.

TESTIMONIALS FROM PARTICIPANTS

"I hope we can contribute to legislative changes, that will enhance our well-being in the society, so we can be a benefit to the Slovenian economy instead of leaving to another country."

(Newcomer)

"I will be more attentive, more sensitive in my professional work. I will try to explain rights, duties and Slovenian legislation to migrants in the simplest, clearest and most understandable way possible."

(Decision-Maker)

"We have opened many new questions and shared good experiences that were important for both sides. The challenge was to form good common positions."

(Decision-Maker)

"I had the opportunity to talk about my challenges and hear the problems of other migrants. I also had an opportunity to talk to decision-makers face to face. This kind of dialogue should become practice, because our experiences should be heard."

(Newcomer)

"I've learned to better motivate others, to offer my help, to be more confident".

(Newcomer)

"We've answered the same questions from completely different starting points. As professionals, we need to get closer to the needs of migrants. I think it is in the interest of migrants that we try to include them in the public assistance system, we must encourage personal contact." (Decision-Maker)

"Now I have a better understanding of my rights and can better advocate for myself."

(Newcomer)



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GLOCALFACTORY



PLACE



MECHELEN



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