

# Slovenia

Sonja Lokar (CEE Network for Gender Issues)

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## Introduction

This case study offers a brief overview of Slovenia's NAP implementation process and of the situation facing women asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Refugee treatment and the care provided to those who may have experienced gender or sexual-based violence are important challenges that European governments must solve in their NAP framework.

## Design

Civil society, particularly the CEE Network for Gender Issues, showed initiative in preparing the NAP. The Slovenian government prepared the NAP (2010) after minimally consulting CSOs. The NAP included incredibly modest financial means, and the CEE Network for Gender Issues, in spite of sustained advocacy, lacks recognition as one of the NAP's implementers.

## Implementation

The Government prepared a formal NAP implementation report, but has not yet presented it to the Parliament. The first and only NAP adopted until now reached its end date in 2015. The Government has not adopted a new NAP due to the ongoing political instability (Slovenia has had three national elections and four different governments in the last three years). Even though new staff work on implementing UNSCR 1325, the limited institutional memory makes this process more problematic.

The first NAP made some progress by promoting gender balance in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Interior (Slovenia now has two women ministers). However degradation of the gender equality mechanisms to a tiny sector under the Ministry of Labour has limited the expertise and resources necessary to fulfilling UNSCR 1325. This lack of capacity became clearly visible when the government had to deal with the massive refugee crisis that hit Slovenia between September 2015 and March 2016.

Close to half a million refugees and migrants have legally transferred from the Croatian to the Austrian borders, of which less than 30% were women. The Interior and Defence Ministries acted in their best efforts to solve women refugees and migrants' basic health and hygiene needs. Women received some hygienic pads and mothers with babies received diapers. However transition camps lacked separate toilets, running water for toilets, and washrooms to shower. Pregnant women had access to emergency health services, with those who gave birth taken to nearby maternity hospitals. Fearing separation from families or groups they had travelled with, many of these women refused to stay in the hospital and left soon after giving birth. In some circumstances, male companions also forced them to continue the journey.

Even though the Government set up transition centres for women nurturing babies, no support existed to aid women who may have experienced problems related to trauma or violence. Feminist volunteers' permanent presence in the transition camps helped to diminish the police staff's potential use of brutal treatment, abuse and violence. However volunteers can do little to protect women from family or group-centred gender-based violence, which still persists. Women travelling alone or without male company are especially vulnerable. Transfer centres' lack of women-oriented safe places, female interpreters and other supportive staff, especially at this mass exodus' beginning, made it impossible to detect, let alone protect, gender-based violence victims.

Mass refugee and migrant movements triggered the worst and the best in Slovenian society. Right wing parties and politicians started to promote Islamophobia and xenophobia, requesting from the "centre left" government strong security measures and the creation of a

national guard meant to protect Slovenian citizens, the European Christian culture and women. Parents and teachers from a local community in Kranj, for example, refused to house child migrants traveling alone. Meanwhile, human rights, humanitarian and women's rights organisations actively supported the refugees and opposed all governmental and public acts violating international human rights. With the media divided as well, the Government sought to reach a compromise. Even though the Government built a razor wire fence along the nation's borders, relevant ministries started coordinating and preparing long-term solutions to accept a minimum of asylum seekers and refugees with temporary legal status, as well as set up systems to integrate these new comers. Slowly, women refugees and asylum seekers receive greater attention.

## **Conclusions**

We believe civil society actors dealing with UNSCR 1325's implementation in Europe should call on their respective governments to:

- Identify best practices to integrating asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and in particular address the special needs women have (such as a woman's need to self-organisation and empowerment).
- Develop cross border cooperation to support women on the move.