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Slovenia

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Country report

Non-discrimination

Transposition and implementation at national level of
Council Directives 2000/43 and 2000/78

Slovenia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

According to the most recent census in 2002, the Slovenian population consists of 83 % ethnic Slovenians, 1.98 % Serbs, 1.81 % Croats, 1.10 % Bosnians, 0.11 % Italians, 0.32 % Hungarians and 0.17 % Roma. Members of the Italian and Hungarian minorities enjoy the status of autochthonous (indigenous) minorities. The Roma have the status of a special ethnic community. People who originate from other republics of the former Yugoslavia do not have any minority status.

The Constitution guarantees special protection for the Roma community in Slovenia. The Roma's special rights are regulated by 12 special acts and various Government programmes with the aim of improving their situation. The 2007 Roma Community Act established a Council of the Roma Community and provides a legal basis for further positive measures for the Roma.¹ Roma people are often victims of discrimination in the fields of education, employment and housing, as was confirmed in 2019 in a report by the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues² and a report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe.³ The Roma Community Act was unsuccessfully challenged before the Constitutional Court three times, on the basis of the argument that the Council of the Roma Community does not ensure equal representation of all Roma in Slovenia, but prioritises Roma from the north-western part of Slovenia, who are considered indigenous (autochthonous). In its 2019 report, ECRI recommended that the Slovenian authorities refrain from using the unhelpful distinction between autochthonous and non-autochthonous Roma and ensure that the Council of the Roma Community becomes more representative.

Migrants and asylum seekers are protected on an equal basis with Slovenian citizens but there are no specific policies or provisions in anti-discrimination laws that are aimed at them.

In 2016, a Civil Union Act was adopted that provides rights for same-sex partners that are equal to those for opposite-sex partners, except in relation to marriage, joint adoption and access to donor insemination.⁴ In June 2022, the Constitutional Court delivered two landmark decisions in which it found that the legal regime which provides that (i) only two persons of different sex may marry and (ii) same-sex partners living in a formal partnership cannot adopt a child together is incompatible with the constitutional prohibition of discrimination.⁵ For more information, see case law in section 12.2 below.

Discrimination against persons with disabilities remains a problem with regard to a number of issues, including unemployment; accessibility of buildings and audio-visual services; and a lack of measures to enable independent living. The Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities⁶ and its rules for implementation⁷ provide for positive measures for

¹ See Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, decision Nos. U-I-166/07, U-I-15/10 and U-I-134/07.

² United Nations (2019), *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues*, available at: <http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/40/64/Add.1&Lang=E>.

³ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Fifth Report on Slovenia, 5 June 2019, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/slovenia>.

⁴ Civil Unions Act (*Zakon o partnerski zvezi*), adopted on 21 April 2016, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7434.

⁵ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, judgments No. U-I-91/21, Up-675/19, 16 June 2022 and U-I-486/20, Up-572/18, 16 June 2022.

⁶ Act amending the Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (*Zakon o spremembah in dopolnitvah Zakona o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov*), 30 June 2014, available at: <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?sop=2014-01-2080>.

⁷ Rules on Technical Aids and Adaptation of Vehicles (*Pravilnik o tehničnih pripomočkih in prilagoditvi vozila*), 1 October 2014, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV12201>.

persons with disabilities. The 2017 Personal Assistance Act, which became applicable on 1 January 2019, provides for state-paid personal assistants for persons with disabilities.⁸

In relation to age discrimination, in 2021 the Constitutional Court found that a legislative measure allowing employers to unilaterally terminate the employment of a person who meets the conditions for the retirement pension⁹ was unconstitutional.¹⁰ The Court focused its reasoning on the inconsistency of the challenged provisions with the International Labour Organization Convention No. 158 (Termination of Employment Convention) and with Article 24 of the European Social Charter (Revised).

The Advocate of the Principle of Equality, established under the 2016 Protection Against Discrimination Act,¹¹ maintained its capacity. By the end of 2022, the Advocate employed 28 staff members.

2. Main legislation

At the constitutional level, discrimination is prohibited by Article 14 of the Constitution, which includes an open-ended list of personal grounds (national origin, race, sex, language, religion, political, or other conviction, material standing, birth, education, social status, disability, or any other personal circumstance).¹² According to the 2009 Constitutional Court ruling, sexual orientation is covered by that provision, although this ground is not specifically listed.¹³ Slovenia has ratified all the main human rights treaties concerning discrimination, most recently Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR). Under Article 8 of the Constitution, they are directly applicable in the legal system of the Republic of Slovenia. Discrimination is also prohibited in the Penal Code,¹⁴ which defines various crimes connected to violations of equal rights (Article 131 – violations of equal rights; Articles 116 and 265 – discriminatory motives in murder and torture; Articles 197, 198 and 202 – violations of equality in employment and social services; and Article 297 – prohibition of incitement to religious or ethnic hatred or hatred based on sexual orientation, sex, skin colour, origin, property status, education, social status, political or other opinion, disability or other personal characteristics).

The main non-discrimination laws are the 2016 Protection Against Discrimination Act (which replaces the 2004 Act Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment¹⁵ that was adopted to transpose the relevant directives), and the 2013 Employment Relationship Act.¹⁶ The 2004 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act¹⁷ specifically prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability and introduces a system of positive measures in respect of the employment of persons with disabilities. In 2010, the

⁸ Personal Assistance Act (*Zakon o osebni asistenci*), 7 February 2017, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7568>.

⁹ Act Determining Intervention Measures to Assist in Mitigating the Consequences of the Second Wave of the COVID-19 Epidemic (*Zakon o interventnih ukrepih za pomoč pri omilitvi posledic drugega vala epidemije covid-19*), 30 December 2020, Articles 21 and 22, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO8304>.

¹⁰ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, decision No. U-I-16/21, U-I-27/21, 18 November 2021, available at: <https://www.us-rs.si/odlocba-ustavnega-sodisca-st-ui-16-21-u-i-27-21-z-dne-18-11-2021/>.

¹¹ Protection Against Discrimination Act (*Zakon o varstvu pred diskriminacijo*), 21 April 2016, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7273>.

¹² Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (*Ustava Republike Slovenije*), 23 December 1992, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=USTA1>.

¹³ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, decision No. U-I-425/06, 2 July 2009.

¹⁴ Penal Code (*Kazenski zakonik*), 20 May 2008, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5050>.

¹⁵ Act Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment (*Zakon o uresničevanju načela enakega obravnavanja*), 22 April 2004, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3908>.

¹⁶ Employment Relationship Act (*Zakon o delovnih razmerjih*), 5 March 2013, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5944>.

¹⁷ Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act (*Zakon o zaposlitveni rehabilitaciji in zaposlovanju invalidov*), 21 May 2004, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3841>.

Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities was adopted,¹⁸ which sets out the duty of appropriate (reasonable) accommodation for persons with disabilities. Not all the planned implementation acts under this law have been adopted, which impedes its practical implementation. Discrimination on the grounds of religion is additionally prohibited by the Freedom of Religion Act.¹⁹

The legislation in place prohibits discrimination in all areas of social life, including the areas required by the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) and the Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC). Discrimination is prohibited on all five grounds required by the directives: race or ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age and disability. In addition, the legislation prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender, language, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation and education, and all key laws include a general clause on 'other personal characteristics'. Based on the case law of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, other personal characteristics may include health status, nationality, pregnancy, parenthood, and family status. The specific protected grounds mentioned in the Employment Relationship Act include social origin, skin colour, health condition, family status, membership of a trade union and financial situation. Since the Civil Union Act equalises the legal consequences of civil union with marriage in almost all areas, the 'family status' ground includes civil unions or de facto couples.

The legislation extends the protection required by the Racial Equality Directive to other grounds as well, which means that discrimination is prohibited on all five grounds (and more) in all areas of life listed in the directive, and in all other areas of life in general

3. Main principles and definitions

Both the Protection Against Discrimination Act and the Employment Relationship Act prohibit direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and instructions to discriminate, as well as victimisation on the grounds of gender, race and ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age and disability. The Protection Against Discrimination Act also prohibits discrimination by association, discrimination by assumption and severe forms of discrimination (multiple discrimination, mass discrimination, long-term or continuous discrimination or discrimination which causes or could cause irreversible consequences for victims in relation to damage to their legal situation, rights or obligations, in particular if it is perpetrated against children or other vulnerable people). Both acts define direct discrimination on the grounds of personal characteristics as an act where, due to such a personal characteristic, an individual has been, is or could be treated less favourably than another individual in an equal or comparable situation. Indirect discrimination on the grounds of a personal characteristic is defined as being when a seemingly neutral provision, criterion or practice in equal or comparable situations and under similar conditions puts an individual person with a certain personal characteristic in a less favourable position in comparison with other individuals. There is an exception to this rule: indirect discrimination is permitted if such a provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate objective and the means of achieving that objective are appropriate and necessary.

Harassment is defined as unwanted conduct, based on any personal circumstance, which creates an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment for an individual or offends their dignity.

Both acts also prohibit victimisation, which means that victims of discrimination and people assisting victims of discrimination should not be exposed to negative consequences for taking action against discrimination.

¹⁸ Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (*Zakon o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov*), 16 November 2010, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4342>.

¹⁹ Freedom of Religion Act (*Zakon o verski svobodi*), 2 February 2007, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4008>.

The acts also define exceptions from the prohibition of discrimination, in particular genuine and determining occupational requirements, which means that difference in treatment in the area of employment is not prohibited when a certain personal characteristic is needed as a condition to perform certain work, provided that the objective of such a condition is legitimate and that the condition is proportionate. The Protection Against Discrimination Act introduces additional exceptions to the prohibition of discrimination, such as different treatment on the grounds of religion or belief in employment with religious institutions or other institutions whose ethics are based on religion or belief, and different treatment in the area of employment, the labour market and vocational training on the ground of age (if this is justified by a legitimate objective and if the means to achieve such an objective are appropriate and necessary). All these exceptions are in accordance with the provisions of the two directives.

The duty of reasonable accommodation is governed by the 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in respect of education, access to goods and services, access to public buildings and access to information. In addition, some form of duty of reasonable accommodation in the field of employment can be indirectly derived from the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act and some provisions of the Employment Relationship Act (the legislation does not call it 'reasonable accommodation'; the terminology used is 'manners, measures and incentives' concerning the employment of persons with disabilities). On 1 January 2019, the Act Regulating the Integrated Early Treatment of Preschool Children with Special Needs²⁰ became applicable, de facto introducing age-related reasonable accommodation for children with special needs in pre-school education.

4. Material scope

National legislation regulates the prohibition of discrimination in all areas required by Directive 2000/43/EC (including both the private and public sectors) for all personal grounds (and not only for the grounds of race and ethnicity).

This means that discrimination is prohibited in access to employment, self-employment and occupation, selection criteria, recruitment conditions, promotion; vocational and professional education and training (including at an advanced level) as well as retraining and practical work experience; employment and working conditions, dismissals and pay; and membership of and involvement in an organisation of workers or employers, or other professional organisation, including the associated benefits. Discrimination on all five grounds (and beyond) is also prohibited in the areas of social protection, social security and healthcare; social advantages; education; and access to and supply of goods and services that are available to the public, including housing.

In addition, the Protection Against Discrimination Act states that this law is binding on state bodies, local communities and holders of public authority, as well as on legal and natural persons who are responsible for ensuring protection from discrimination in all fields of exercising public authority, participation in legal transactions and all other areas of their activities, which means that protection from discrimination extends far beyond the requirements of the directives.

In the field of employment, discrimination is prohibited by not only the Protection Against Discrimination Act but the Employment Relationship Act; both are binding on both the public and private sectors, as are the Penal Code and the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act.

²⁰ Act Regulating the Integrated Early Treatment of Pre-school Children with Special Needs (*Zakon o celostni zgodnji obravnavi predšolskih otrok s posebnimi potrebami*), 14 July 2017, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7681>.

5. Enforcing the law

Victims of discrimination have at their disposal formal and informal procedures for the protection of the right to equal treatment. The victim can lodge a complaint with the Advocate of the Principle of Equality or the competent inspectorate for an inspection procedure or, if the alleged perpetrator is a state or a state-related body, also with the Human Rights Ombudsman. The Advocate can refer the case to the competent inspectorate to initiate a formal misdemeanour procedure. If the inspectorate's assessment finds that discrimination has occurred, the offender may be fined. The victim can file a lawsuit in the civil courts (including the labour and social courts for employment and social security matters) and claim compensation for damages suffered as a direct result of the discrimination. If an act of discrimination amounts to a criminal act, it can be reported to the police or the prosecutor's office. The victim also has the possibility of using administrative procedures, judicial review and a constitutional complaint for the protection of their rights. Legal remedies are increasingly used in discrimination cases.

The Protection Against Discrimination Act defines the possibility of involvement by NGOs and the Advocate in judicial and administrative proceedings in cases of alleged discrimination, in accordance with the conditions defined by law. The Civil Procedure Act²¹ also includes other, more general rules for representation of victims in court procedures.

In 2022, the Advocate finished its first representation in a discrimination case, which was initiated in 2019. The case concerned age discrimination in access to employment as a sports referee and led to a finding at first instance of discrimination, an award of compensation for the claimant to the amount of EUR 2 000, and an order for the respondent to publish the judgment in the media at its own expense.²² Both the applicant and the association have appealed the respective decisions. In 2022, the Court of Appeal dismissed both appeals and upheld the judgment of the court of first instance.²³

According to the Constitutional Court, associations and other entities do not have the right to challenge regulations that interfere with the legal status of their members or other people. However, under the Protection Against Discrimination Act, the Advocate has the power to initiate constitutional review of laws that are allegedly discriminatory. In 2022, this power was not used.

In 2017, the Class Actions Act²⁴ was adopted, according to which the only permissible class action in relation to discrimination is an action claiming termination of the discriminatory acts. No damages may be claimed with a class action. The class action provisions have not yet been invoked in a discrimination case.

Both the Protection Against Discrimination Act and the Employment Relationship Act introduce the rule of the shift of the burden of proof, stating that when victims state facts which justify the assumption that the prohibition of discrimination on protected grounds has been violated, the alleged perpetrator must prove that discrimination did not take place. If a violation of the ban on discrimination is established, relevant sanctions apply in the form of misdemeanour fines, criminal sanctions, compensation, publication of the judgment, etc. Misdemeanour fines formally range from EUR 250 to EUR 30 000, but in fact the fines imposed may not exceed the minimum, since there is no explicit provision in law allowing for imposing fines higher than the minimum. This means that fines cannot be considered as sanctions that are proportionate and dissuasive. In practice, fines are used in discrimination cases by the Labour Inspectorate only. Example of compensation

²¹ Civil Procedure Act (*Zakon o pravdnem postopku*), 25 March 1999, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1212>.

²² County Court Ljubljana, Judgment no. IV P 1366/2019 of 8 October 2021, available at: Link: <https://www.zagovornik.si/okrajno-sodisce-pritrdilo-zagovorniku-da-je-kolesarski-sodnik-zrtev-starizma/>.

²³ Higher Court Ljubljana, judgment No. I Cp 616/2022, 28 June 2022.

²⁴ Class Actions Act (*Zakon o kolektivnih tožbah*), 55/17, 26 September 2017, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7399>.

payments that was awarded by courts in 2022 (EUR 2 000) show that the sanctions issued in the form of compensation may not be considered proportionate and dissuasive.²⁵

National law does not specify whether the use of situational testing would be admissible as evidence in the courts. Regarding the use of statistical evidence in court, claimants have the right to request that respondents provide statistical data; however, they are limited in doing so by the Personal Data Protection Act. There have been only a few cases in which statistical data have been used (for instance, in a case related to the ground of health).²⁶

Positive action measures exist in relation to the Roma community (political representation at the local level, which is important for all fields); persons with disabilities (quotas and positive action measures in the field of employment); and various protected groups in the field of employment (such as younger and older workers).

6. Equality bodies

In 2022, the capacity of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, the independent equality body that has existed since 2016, to address discrimination was comparable to the previous year. By the end of 2022, it had 28 employees. Before 2016, the Advocate consisted of one civil servant working at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, and before 2012 at the Government Office for Equal Opportunities.

The mandate of the Advocate as an independent body is to conduct independent research on the situation of people with certain personal characteristics; publish independent reports and issue recommendations; undertake controls to ensure that legislation is respected; provide independent assistance to victims of discrimination in the form of advice and legal aid to parties in other administrative and judicial procedures related to discrimination; raise awareness among the general public about discrimination and measures for its prevention; monitor the general situation in Slovenia in the field of protection from discrimination and the situation of people with certain personal characteristics; propose the adoption of special measures to improve the situation of people who are in a less favourable situation due to a certain personal characteristic; take part in judicial proceedings initiated because of discrimination; ensure the exchange of available information with European Union bodies; and conduct other tasks. The Advocate's budget in 2022 was EUR 1 462 709.

The procedure on establishing discrimination before the Advocate is formal and free of charge. The Advocate has investigative powers and issues declaratory decisions, in line with the General Administrative Procedure Act, on whether or not discrimination has taken place, but it cannot impose misdemeanour fines or other sanctions in the case of a violation. If the perpetrator does not comply with the Advocate's decisions, the Advocate may refer the case to the competent inspectorate to carry out a misdemeanour procedure (if there is such an inspectorate for the field that the case concerns). The Advocate does not yet carry out inspection procedures (which would enable it to order actions to be taken by perpetrators) as the legal basis in that respect is insufficiently clear. However, it does address recommendations to public and private law bodies on actions needed to prevent or end discrimination.

The independence of the Advocate is ensured by its position as an independent state body in law as well as by the nomination procedure, in which the nominee for Advocate is proposed by the President of the Republic and elected by the National Assembly. Under the previous legislation, the Advocate had only limited powers (which focused on assistance to victims and examining complaints), but it now also has explicitly stated powers to conduct surveys and publish reports. According to the most recent annual report, the

²⁵ Higher Court Ljubljana, judgment No. I Cp 616/2022, 28 June 2022.

²⁶ Higher Labour and Social Court, judgment No. Pdp 1283/2010, 5 May 2011.

Advocate dealt with 586 discrimination cases in 2022; 328 cases were closed, while 82 cases were rolled over to 2023.²⁷

7. Key issues

- Despite the fact that a number of legal remedies exist on paper, the data shows that they are not effective. In 2022, 37 cases which concerned discrimination or in which the parties claimed that discrimination had occurred were decided by the courts. No new cases in which courts awarded compensation could be identified.
- The sanctions (fines for misdemeanours or minor offences) prescribed in a range from a maximum to a minimum are in fact prescribed only at the minimum end of the range. The Protection Against Discrimination Act does not explicitly authorise the inspectorates to impose fines higher than the minimum, which means that, by law, legal persons do not have to pay more than EUR 3 000 in fines for discrimination, while natural persons do not have to pay more than EUR 250 or EUR 500, depending on the gravity and type of offence. This indicates that misdemeanour fines cannot be regarded as effective and dissuasive.
- In terms of legal standing, the conditions for representation of a victim by an NGO or the Advocate are stricter for judicial cases of discrimination that are dealt with by county courts than for any other judicial case. According to the Civil Procedure Act, anyone with legal capacity may represent a party before the county courts, while according to the new Protection Against Discrimination Act, an individual must have passed the state legal exam (bar exam) in order to represent a complainant.
- It is not clear whether the Protection Against Discrimination Act provisions on remedies that can be claimed before courts in cases of discrimination (termination of the discrimination, compensation and publication of the judgment in the media) now exist in addition to the general tort law provisions or whether these provisions replace the general tort law rules.
- On a related matter, it is not clear whether the ceiling for compensation, which is set at EUR 5 000, is in place only for compensation claimed solely due to exposure to discrimination or for compensation in cases of discrimination in general. The verbatim interpretation supports the former position. If the former is true, the sanctions could not be considered dissuasive, as this would mean that compensation in cases of discrimination could never exceed EUR 5 000, even if the actual damages were much higher.
- There is no national action plan or strategy concerning discrimination. The situation of the Roma, for which the Government Office for National Minorities is competent, is often not dealt with as a discrimination issue. Disability issues are left entirely to the Office for Persons with Disabilities within the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs.
- There is a lack of equality data, due to the strict interpretation of the Personal Data Protection Act.
- The courts are not obliged to collect data on discrimination cases, and hence they have difficulties in reporting on such cases. The publicly accessible database sodnapraksa.si is not comprehensive; court cases that became final in the first instance (because they were not appealed) are not included in the database.
- Judicial interpretation is required with regard to whether situation testing is permitted by law and whether situation testing and statistical evidence are admissible as evidence in courts.
- There is no common definition of 'intellectual disability'.
- The Social Care Act is discriminatory in the area of equal access to employment, since adults who obtain disability status under the Act have the right to receive social benefits but are automatically presumed to be unable to live independently and unable to be employed, regardless of their actual ability to work.

²⁷ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2020 – 1. del)*, p. 42, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

- Age limits for access to certain jobs could be in breach of Council Directive 2000/78/EC and CJEU case law, such as *Prigge and Others* (C-447/09).

INTRODUCTION

The national legal system

According to its Constitution, the Republic of Slovenia is a democratic republic, governed by the rule of law. It is a unified state, and competence for the adoption of national law in the field of non-discrimination rests with the National Assembly. All laws, regulations and other general legal provisions must conform to the Constitution. Laws must conform to generally accepted principles of international law and with valid treaties ratified by the National Assembly, whereas regulations and other general legal provisions must comply with other treaties ratified by the Government. Regulations and other general legal provisions must conform to the Constitution and laws. Legal acts and decisions adopted within international organisations to which Slovenia has transferred the exercise of part of its sovereign rights (such as the European Union) shall be applied in Slovenia in accordance with the legal regulation of these organisations. All legislation in Slovenia may be subject to revision by the Constitutional Court. Article 14 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia prohibits discrimination on the grounds of national origin, race, gender, language, religion, political or other beliefs, financial status, birth, education, social status, disability or any other personal characteristic.²⁸

List of main legislation transposing and implementing the directives

Title of the Law: Protection Against Discrimination Act

Name used in this report: N/A

Abbreviation: PADA

Date of adoption: 21 April 2016

Entry into force: 24 May 2016

Latest relevant amendment: /

Web link: <http://www.pisrs.si>

Grounds protected: gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic

Civil law, administrative law

Material scope: access to employment, self-employment or profession, access to all levels of career orientation, professional training, advanced training and retraining, practical work experience; employment and working conditions, dismissals and pay; membership of and involvement in an organisation of workers or employers, or other professional organisation, including the benefits; social protection, social security and healthcare; social advantages; education; access to and supply of goods and services which are available to the public, including housing

Principal content: Prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, victimisation, shift of burden of proof, exceptions, establishment of equality body, the procedure of the equality body, sanctions

Title of the law: Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act

Name used in this report: N/A

Abbreviation: VREPDA

Date of adoption: 21 May 2004

Entry into force: 25 June 2004

Latest relevant amendment: 23 December 2014

Web link: <http://www.pisrs.si>

Grounds covered: disability

Administrative Law, Labour Law

²⁸ Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (*Ustava Republike Slovenije*), *Official Journal of the Republic of Slovenia*, No. 33/1991.

Material scope: Employment Principal content: Positive action, creation of a specialised body
Title of the law: Act on Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities Name used in this report: N/A Abbreviation: AEOPD Date of adoption: 16 November 2010 Entry into force: 11 December 2010 Latest relevant amendment: 20 June 2017 Web link: http://www.pisrs.si Grounds covered: disability Administrative law Material scope: Employment, education, access to and supply of goods and services which are available to the public, including housing. Principal content: Appropriate (reasonable) accommodation
Title of the law: Employment Relationship Act Name used in this report: N/A Abbreviation: ERA Date of adoption: 5 March 2013 Entry into force: 12 April 2013 Latest relevant amendment: 29 December 2020 Web link: http://www.pisrs.si Grounds covered: Ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, national and social origin, gender, skin colour, health condition, disability, religion or belief, age, sexual orientation, family status, membership of a trade union, financial situation or other personal circumstance. Labour law Material scope: Public employment, private employment Principal content: Prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, instruction to discriminate, sanctions, shift of burden of proof, genuine and determining professional requirements, victimisation, responsibility for damages
Title of the law: Penal Code Name used in this report: N/A Abbreviation: PC Date of adoption: 20 May 2008 Entry into force: 1 November 2008 Latest relevant amendment: 1 June 2017 Web link: http://www.pisrs.si Grounds covered: Ethnicity, race, colour, religion, ethnic roots, gender, language, political or other belief, sexual orientation, social status, birth, education, social position or any other circumstance Criminal law Material scope: / Principal content: Prohibition of unequal treatment, prohibition of incitement to ethnic or religious hatred, or hatred on the basis of sexual orientation, prohibition of violation of equal rights at employment and social services
Title of the law: Protection of Public Order Act Name used in this report: N/A Abbreviation: PPOA Date of adoption: 22 June 2006 Entry into force: 21 July 2006 Latest relevant amendment: / Web link: http://www.pisrs.si Grounds covered: Ethnicity, race, gender, religious, political opinion or sexual orientation Criminal law/misdemeanour law Material scope: /

Principal content: Prohibition of incitement to intolerance (hate speech)

Title of the law: Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia

Name used in this report: N/A

Abbreviation: CRS

Date of adoption: 23 December 1991

Entry into force: 23 December 1991

Latest relevant amendment: 31 May 2013

Web link: <http://www.pisrs.si>

Grounds covered: National origin, race, gender, language, religion, political or other beliefs, financial status, birth, education, social status, disability

Constitutional law

Material scope: /

Principal content: /

1 GENERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Constitutional provisions on protection against discrimination and the promotion of equality

The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia includes the following articles dealing with non-discrimination:

- Article 14(1) states that everyone shall be guaranteed equal human rights and fundamental freedoms irrespective of national origin, race, gender, language, religion, political or other beliefs, financial status, birth, education, social status, disability or any other personal characteristic. Although sexual orientation and age are not stated among the various grounds on which discrimination is prohibited, this can be derived from the general clause. The fact that sexual orientation is a protected ground under the meaning of Article 14 of the Constitution was confirmed by the Constitutional Court in its decision No. U-I-425/06 of 2 July 2009.
- Article 63 stipulates that any incitement to ethnic, racial, religious or other discrimination, as well as inflaming of ethnic, racial, religious or other hatred or intolerance, shall be deemed unconstitutional.
- Article 34 establishes the right to personal dignity and safety.
- Article 35 establishes the protection of the right to privacy and personality rights.
- Article 22 states that everyone shall be guaranteed equal protection of their rights in any proceeding before a court or before other state authorities, local community authorities and bearers of public authority that decide on their rights, duties or legal interests.

These provisions apply to all areas covered by the directives. Their material scope is broader than those of the directives.

These provisions are directly applicable.

These provisions can be enforced against private individuals (as well as against the state).

2 THE DEFINITION OF DISCRIMINATION

2.1 Definition of the grounds of unlawful discrimination within the directives

a) Racial or ethnic origin

There is no definition in law of 'racial and ethnic origin'.

Ethnicity: in 2011, Ljubljana High Court issued a decision, in which it provided guidance on how 'ethnicity' (*narodnost*) should be understood in the context of prohibition of incitement to racial or ethnic hatred in the Penal Code.²⁹ The court stated that all ethnicities enjoy the protection of the law, regardless of whether they are recognised as national minorities or not. The term 'ethnicity' should therefore be interpreted in line with Articles 63 and 14 of the Constitution, international instruments and recommendations on the Roma which are binding on Slovenia. In its judgment, the Court referred specifically to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Therefore, legal protection is also accorded to an ethnic group such as the Roma, which does not have the official status of a national minority. The judgment of the High Court came following a first-instance judgment in which the County Court stated that the Roma enjoy the protection of the Penal Code. In the appeal, the representatives of the accused claimed that they do not, because they are not a recognised national minority.

There is no similar case law relating to race.

b) Religion or belief

There is no definition in law of 'religion or belief'.

The Religious Freedom Act³⁰ does not define religion but states that religious freedom encompasses freedom of expression of religious belief, renouncement of its expression and the freedom of everyone, alone or in a group, with others, privately or publicly, to express their religion at a religious service or class, through practice or religious rituals or in another way. Religious freedom includes conscientious objection to an obligation required by law that seriously contradicts an individual's religious belief, if this does not impede the rights of other people, in cases defined by law. There have been no such cases yet that would clarify whether a service provider has a legal ground to refuse serving a same-sex couple on the basis of his/her religious belief. Such conscientious objection is not provided for by law. Conscientious objection is, for example, defined in the Medical Practitioners Act³¹ (for medical workers) and in the Regulation on the Enforcement of the Conscientious Objection to the Military Service and of the Civil Alternative Service³² (for military personnel). The military service regulation states that conscientious objection can be related to religious, philosophical and humanitarian reasons.³³ Conscientious objection is not further defined in the Medical Practitioners Act, hence judicial interpretation is required to confirm that conscientious objection by medical practitioners can be related to philosophical or humanitarian reasons.

In a case relating to political opinion, the Supreme Court articulated that the term 'religion or belief' does not include political opinion. It stated that 'belief' should not be understood

²⁹ Higher Court Ljubljana, judgment II Kp 24633/2010, 13 September 2011.

³⁰ Religious Freedom Act (*Zakon o verski svobodi*), 2 February 2007, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4008.

³¹ Medical Practitioners Act (*Zakon o zdravniški službi*), 18 November 1999, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1395>.

³² Regulation on the Enforcement of the Conscientious Objection to the Military Service and of the Civil Alternative Service (*Uredba o uveljavljanju ugovora vesti vojaški dolžnosti in o izvajanju civilne službe*), 27 June 1996, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=URED999>.

³³ Medical Practitioners Act (*Zakon o zdravniški službi*), 18 November 1999, Article 8(4), available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1395>.

as any kind of difference of opinion. For definition, the Court turned to an official dictionary of Slovenian language, according to which 'belief' means a belief on basic and general views on the world, society or a human, in the sense of 'defending or rejecting one's belief', 'to be ready to die for one's belief' or 'to be Marxist by belief'. Hence, belief has to be close to the meaning of a religion, and not to the meaning of an opinion.³⁴

In a 2022 case decided by the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, in which a pro-life association whose campaign had been terminated by the provider of marketing services, the latter claimed discrimination based on both religion and belief (see section 12.2 on case law). In the case, the Advocate also referred to the above-mentioned decision of the Supreme Court. The Advocate found that the association had sufficiently demonstrated that it protects the freedom to express the 'pro-life' conceptual declaration or belief in public, which meets the standard of protection under Article 40 of the Constitution (freedom of conscience). However, as 'pro-life' belief is closely related to or rooted in the doctrines of the Christian faith, it also enjoys protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion. The Advocate added that even if someone were to express a 'pro-life' belief and it did not derive from the doctrine of the Christian or other religion, the Advocate would recognise such a belief as one that enjoys legal protection under the PADA. In this particular case, the Advocate found that the campaign was terminated only because some sections of the public had criticised the fact that the association, as an organisation opposing the right to abortion, was allowed to advertise on public buses, even though they were only advertising their counselling programmes for people in need. The Advocate found that the advertisement itself did not have any elements that would incite intolerance.³⁵

c) Disability

There is no definition of disability in the Protection Against Discrimination Act. Under the 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities³⁶ the definition of a person with disabilities follows the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: persons with disabilities are those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. This definition is close to that set out in *Ring and Skouboe Werge*. This law therefore applies the meaning of disability to people who have not been officially recognised as belonging to one of the categories of disability. There is no limitation in the law on the legal contexts in which this latter definition could be used. Therefore, it could be used both in the case of determining the duty of reasonable accommodation and when invoking the Protection Against Discrimination Act.

Further, under the Pension and Disability Insurance Act,³⁷ employees with disabilities are classed in one of three categories according to their capacity for work. Those in category I are considered not to be capable of working, while those in categories II and III are able and allowed to work, subject to certain limitations or after rehabilitation. Disability status is granted if the impairment of the insured individual's health cannot be reversed by medical treatment or medical rehabilitation. The definition of disability in the Pension and Disability Insurance Act may be used, but not exclusively, for the purposes of defining disability in the Protection Against Discrimination Act and other laws prohibiting discrimination.

According to the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act, the term 'persons with disabilities' applies to an individual who has been granted the status of

³⁴ Supreme Court of the Republic of Slovenia, ruling No. I Up 27/2008, 23 June 2008.

³⁵ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, assessment of discrimination, No0700-2/2019/98, 16 June 2022, available at: <https://zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ODLOCBA-Izvajalec-javnega-prevoza-diskriminiral-na-podlagi-vere-ali-prepricanja-ponovljeni-postopek.pdf>.

³⁶ Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (*Zakon o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov*), 16 November 2010, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4342.

³⁷ Pension and Disability Insurance Act (*Zakon o pokojninskem in invalidskem zavarovanju*), 4 December 2012, Article 63(2), available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO6280.

a person with disabilities in accordance with the Pension and Disability Insurance Act, or any other regulation, and to an individual for whom the consequences of a permanent physical or mental impairment or disease have been ascertained by an administrative decision, and whose chances of obtaining or retaining a job or obtaining promotion are substantially reduced. The definition of disability under this law therefore differs from that adopted by the CJEU in *Ring and Skouboe Werge*.³⁸ In the case the CJEU stated that concept of 'disability' must be understood as referring to a limitation which results in particular from physical, mental or psychological impairments and which hinders the participation of the person concerned in professional life.

If the disability of a person emerged before the person reached the age of majority, he or she receives a status under the Social Inclusion of Disabled Persons Act.³⁹ Under this Act, the status of a person with disability is granted to persons with mild, moderate or severe intellectual disabilities; persons with autistic disorders that result in such a severe form of maladaptive behaviour that it prevents them from living independently and earning a living; deafblind people with at least 50 % Fowler hearing loss and categories 1 to 5 of blindness and low vision; persons with moderate to severe brain injury or impairment; and the persons with the most severe disabilities who, due to their disability, cannot integrate into society on their own and ensure their social security. The condition for obtaining the status of a person with disability under this Act is that the disability arose before the person's coming of age or, if the person is in school, no later than the age of 26. Exceptions are people with moderate to severe brain damage or impairment, people with autistic disorders and deafblind people, who may also obtain this status even if their disability occurred later, but before their first employment or if they do not acquire any rights from disability insurance.

The Social Care Act⁴⁰ is also relevant to the status of persons with disabilities. The Act defines a person with disabilities as 'an adult with a severe disorder in their mental development or with severe physical impairments who needs assistance in performing all the basic functions of life'. There is no further explanation of what 'severe' entails.

d) Age

There is no definition in law of 'age'. However, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality has interpreted age as including discrimination against elderly and young people.⁴¹

e) Sexual orientation

There is no definition in law of 'sexual orientation'.

In a 2013 landmark decision, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia invoked a definition of sexual orientation as stated in the Yogyakarta Principles, according to which sexual orientation means 'each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender'.⁴² This definition has not been repeated or invoked in the judgments of lower courts, which have not yet elaborated on the meaning of sexual orientation. The Yogyakarta principles did not seem to play any

³⁸ Joined cases C-335/11 and C-337/11, *HK Danmark, acting on behalf of Jette Ring v. Dansk almennyttigt Boligselskab*, and *HK Danmark, acting on behalf of Lone Skouboe Werge v. Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening, acting on behalf of Pro Display A/S, in liquidation*, 11 April 2013.

³⁹ Social Inclusion of Disabled Persons Act (*Zakon o socialnem vključevanju invalidov*), 17 April 2018, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7808>.

⁴⁰ Social Care Act (*Zakon o socialnem varstvu*), 4 November 1992, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO869.

⁴¹ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2012), *Annual Report for 2011 (Letno poročilo za leto 2011)*, p. 83, available at: www.mddsz.gov.si/fileadmin/migrated/content/uploads/zagovornik_LP_2011.doc.

⁴² Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, judgment No. U-I-212/10-16, 29 March 2013

other role in the reasoning of the Constitutional Court on issues of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

2.2 Multiple and intersectional discrimination

In Slovenia, multiple discrimination is prohibited by law.

In line with Article 12, indent 1 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, multiple discrimination, which is considered to be a severe form of discrimination, exists when a person is discriminated against based on more than one personal characteristic. The fact that multiple discrimination is considered to be a severe form of discrimination is relevant in determining the amount of compensation (Article 39(3)) or the amount of the fine for misdemeanour (Article 45(2)).

In Slovenia, there is no recent case law on multiple discrimination. According to the available information, only one judgment that relates to multiple discrimination has so far been issued, and it was delivered before multiple discrimination was explicitly defined by law. In the case in question, a claimant complained of discrimination on the grounds of gender, age and family status in relation to access to a non-profit apartment (social housing apartments made available by municipalities for rent lower than the market rate). The court rejected the claim and stated that, since the defendant (the Municipality of Ljubljana) respected the conditions set out in the implementing act, its decision was in accordance with the law and was therefore correct. The court stated that the conditions for access to public housing are set down by the law and the implementing acts, and are equal for all; according to the court, the defendant's decision was a consequence not of discrimination but of the claimant's failure to fulfil the conditions.⁴³

The Advocate of the Principle of Equality dealt with several cases of multiple discrimination (two cases in 2009, three in 2010 and two in 2011).⁴⁴ Between 2012 and 2015, the Advocate did not publish its reports. The reports covering 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 do not mention multiple discrimination cases.

In Slovenia, intersectional discrimination is not explicitly prohibited by law.

However, Article 4(1) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act does not limit the definition of discrimination to a single personal circumstance.

In Slovenia, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality has dealt with cases in which intersectional discrimination was found, indicating that in accordance with the Advocate's interpretation, intersectional discrimination is prohibited by law.⁴⁵

2.3 Assumed and associated discrimination

a) Discrimination by assumption

In Slovenia, discrimination based on a perception or assumption of a person's characteristics is prohibited in national law.

In line with Article 5(2), indent 2 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, equal treatment shall be guaranteed for a person who is discriminated against due to an erroneous assumption of the existence of a certain personal characteristic. In the opinion

⁴³ Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia, judgment No. U 947/2007-12, 20 March 2008.

⁴⁴ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2012), *Annual Report for 2011*, available at: www.mddsz.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/enake_moznosti/zagovornik/letna_porocila/.

⁴⁵ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, decision No. 0700-41/2020/15, 3 December 2021, available at: https://www.zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ODLOCBA_Trajno-izkljucevanje-vseh-istospolno-usmerjenih-moskih-iz-krvodajalstva-je-diskriminacija-1.pdf.

of the author, Article 6(3) of the Employment Relationship Act, which states that 'equal treatment shall be guaranteed, irrespective of personal characteristic', could be interpreted by the court, using the argument *a maiore ad minus* (that is, 'what includes more, also covers less'), as covering assumed characteristics. Namely, the law does not specifically state that the individual who is discriminated against must actually have the personal characteristic on the grounds of which the discrimination allegedly occurred. There is no case law on discrimination by assumption.

b) Discrimination by association

In Slovenia, discrimination based on association with persons with particular characteristics is prohibited in national law.

In line with Article 5(2), indent 1 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, equal treatment shall be guaranteed for a person who is legally or factually associated with the person with a certain personal characteristic. In addition, in the opinion of the author, a court could interpret the provisions in Article 6(3) of the Employment Relationship Act as covering discrimination by association, as required by the CJEU case *Coleman v. Attridge Law and Steve Law*.⁴⁶ This act does not state that the victim must have the personal characteristic on the grounds of which the discrimination allegedly occurred.

So far, there has been no case law interpreting the prohibition of discrimination by association. In one case dealt with by the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, discrimination by association was at stake, but the case was settled.⁴⁷

2.4 Direct discrimination (Article 2(2)(a))

a) Prohibition and definition of direct discrimination

In Slovenia, direct discrimination is prohibited in national law under Article 4(2) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act. Discrimination in general is defined as any unjustified factual or legal unequal treatment, differentiation, exclusion or limitation or omission due to personal characteristics which aims at or results in hindering, reducing or abolishing equal recognition, enjoyment or realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, other rights, legal interests or benefits (Article 4(1) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act). Equal treatment is defined as the absence of direct or indirect discrimination due to any personal characteristic, as well as the absence of any other treatment which constitutes discrimination under this law (Article 5(1)), i.e. harassment, instructions, incitement and victimisation (Article 7).

Direct discrimination is defined as follows: direct discrimination on the grounds of a personal characteristic occurs if, due to this personal characteristic, a person or a group has been, is or would be treated less favourably than another individual or group is treated, was treated or would be treated in an equal or comparable situation (Article 6(1) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act). The Employment Relationship Act also defines direct discrimination: Article 6(3) states that 'direct discrimination occurs if an individual due to a personal characteristic is, was or could have been treated less favourably than another individual in equal or similar situations'. Finally, Article 3 of the Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities states that direct discrimination on grounds of disability occurs if, due to his or her disability, a person with a disability has been, is or would be treated less favourably than another person in an equal or comparable situation.

In 2022, the Advocate found direct discrimination in several cases. For example, it found direct discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin in the case of three Roma persons who

⁴⁶ Judgment of 17 July 2008, *S. Coleman v. Attridge Law and Steve Law*, C-303/06.

⁴⁷ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, conclusion No. 0700-43/2021.

were denied service at a bar.⁴⁸ It also found direct discrimination on the ground of religion or belief in a case in which a radio discriminated against certain political parties whose programmes and speeches contradicted the teachings of the Catholic Church.⁴⁹ For more information, see case law in section 12.2 below.

b) Justification for direct discrimination

The law in general does not permit direct discrimination. However, Article 13(1) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act states that, despite the general requirement to ensure equal treatment in Article 5, differential treatment based on a personal characteristic does not constitute discrimination in line with this act, if such treatment is based on a legitimate goal and if the means for achieving this goal are appropriate, necessary and proportionate.

The law then introduces an exception to this exception by stating that, regardless of the previous sentence, unequal treatment in fields related to employment and work is always prohibited if it is based on gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or opinion, disability, age or sexual orientation, except in specific cases stipulated by the directives (see Chapter 4). Hence, apart from defining the exception relating to a genuine occupational requirement, the law does not include a complete prohibition of direct discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity beyond employment as required by Directive 2000/43/EC.

2.5 Indirect discrimination (Article 2(2)(b))

a) Prohibition and definition of indirect discrimination

In Slovenia, indirect discrimination is prohibited in national law under Article 4(2) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act. It is defined in Article 6(2) as follows: indirect discrimination on grounds of personal characteristics occurs when a seemingly neutral provision, criterion or practice in equal or comparable situations and under similar conditions, puts, put or could have put an individual or a group with a certain personal characteristic in a less favourable position in comparison with other persons, unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively based on a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.

Indirect discrimination is also defined in the Employment Relationship Act, which states that indirect discrimination exists when an individual with a certain personal characteristic was, is or could be, due to a seemingly neutral provision, criterion or practice in equal or similar situations and conditions, placed in a less favourable situation than other individuals, unless this provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and if the means to achieve such an aim are appropriate and necessary (Article 6(3)).

Article 3 of the Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities states that indirect discrimination on the grounds of disability occurs when a seemingly neutral provision, criterion or practice, in equal or comparable situations and under similar conditions, puts an individual with disabilities in a less favourable position in comparison with other individuals, unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.

Judicial interpretation is required in order to confirm whether the definition of indirect discrimination in the Employment Relationship Act and the Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities is identical to the definition in the directives. In Slovenian, 'necessary' can be translated as *potrebno* (needed), which is the word used in the law, or as *nujno* (required), which is how the directives have been translated.

⁴⁸ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, decision No. 0700-8/2022/48, 19 December 2022.

⁴⁹ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, decision No. 0700-9/2022/9, 19 September 2022.

In 2022, the Advocate found indirect discrimination on the grounds of disability in a case, in which a company unfairly deprived the complainant of Christmas bonuses because it set attendance at work as the criterion for determining its amount.⁵⁰ For more information, see case law in section 12.2 below.

b) Justification test for indirect discrimination

According to the definition of indirect discrimination, there must be an objective justification with a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim must be appropriate and necessary. The courts rarely apply the definition of indirect discrimination and the justification test for indirect discrimination, while the equality body applies both.

2.5.1 Statistical evidence

Section 2.5.1 has not been updated for 2022. Regarding both the legal framework and the practice, please see: Country report Non-discrimination Slovenia 2022, Transposition and implementation at national level of Council directives 2000/43 and 2000/78, reporting period 1.1.2021 – 1.1.2022.

2.6 Harassment (Article 2(3))

a) Prohibition and definition of harassment

In Slovenia, harassment is prohibited in national law. It is prohibited as a form of discrimination, which is generally prohibited in Article 4(2).

Article 8(1) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act (PADA) defines harassment as unwanted conduct, based on any personal characteristic, which intentionally or factually creates an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment for an individual or offends their dignity. This means that conduct with the aim, but not the result, of creating such an environment, as well as conduct without the intention but with the result of creating such an environment, are covered by the definition. The personal and material scopes therefore do not differ from those in which direct and indirect discrimination are prohibited. This definition does not exclude groups of persons from protection, nor has it been interpreted as such.

The Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities does not contain a prohibition of harassment, but only a definition of harassment (in Article 3(5)), which is identical to the definition in the Protection Against Discrimination Act. Harassment is therefore not explicitly prohibited by the Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities; however, it is prohibited by the PADA.

Article 7 of the Employment Relationship Act prohibits sexual or other harassment. The provision does not exclude same-sex sexual harassment, which means that the latter is also prohibited by law. Harassment is defined as any unwanted conduct, related to any personal characteristic, with the effect or purpose of injuring the dignity of an individual or creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment. The rejection of conduct that is considered to be harassment should never constitute a legitimate reason to discriminate, which means that if an employee refuses to be harassed, he or she should not suffer any adverse consequences in the form of discrimination. The definitions of harassment in national law comply with the directives. The personal and material scope therefore does not differ from those in which direct and indirect discrimination are prohibited.

⁵⁰ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, decision No. 0700-26/2021/18, 7 July 2022.

Harassment in the workplace is also prohibited by the Penal Code, which provides that harassment constitutes a crime. Article 197 of the Code imposes a sanction on harassment in the workplace, stating that anyone causing humiliation or fear to another employee by means of sexual harassment, psychological violence, bullying or unequal treatment is sanctioned with imprisonment of up to two years.

In Slovenia, harassment explicitly constitutes a form of discrimination. Article 7(1) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act states that harassment as referred to in Article 8(1), as well as any less favourable treatment based on rejection or toleration of harassment, shall be considered discrimination under the provisions of the Act.

b) Scope of liability for harassment

Where harassment is perpetrated by an employee, in Slovenia the employer and the employee are liable (the victim can file a lawsuit against either of them or both of them at the same time).

The Protection Against Discrimination Act (Article 39(1)) defines in general terms the scope of liability for discriminatory treatment in every sphere of life, including employment. The provision states that the person who believes that he or she was discriminated against may file a lawsuit to demand the termination of the discrimination, compensation for the discrimination and publication of the judgment in the media. According to the general principles of liability for damages, an individual who has caused damage must compensate for it, unless they can prove that they were not responsible for it. The Code of Obligations⁵¹ also regulates liability for others. According to Article 147 of the Code of Obligations, an employer is liable for damage caused to a third person by an employee during work or in connection with work unless he or she proves that the employee acted properly. Shared liability is defined in Article 171 of the Code of Obligations, which states that, if the victim contributed to damage or increased the scope of damage, he or she only has the right to damages that are proportionally reduced. In the field of employment, Article 8 of the 2013 Employment Relationship Act states that, in the case of a violation of the prohibition of discrimination or bullying in the workplace, the employer is liable in relation to the candidate or worker in line with the general provisions of civil law. In accordance with Article 47 of the Act, the employer is obliged to guarantee a working environment without harassment.

2.7 Instructions to discriminate (Article 2(4))

a) Prohibition of instructions to discriminate

In Slovenia, instructions to discriminate are prohibited in national law. Instructions are defined as decrees, orders or other types of instructions to discriminate against an individual based on their personal characteristics (Article 7, indent 2, of the Protection Against Discrimination Act). This definition does not exclude groups from protection, nor has it been interpreted as such. Another provision states that instructions are any type of instructions, the consequence of which is, was or could have been discrimination, including instructions that discrimination should not be prevented or eliminated (Article 9). This shows that in defining instructions to discriminate, the law goes beyond the directive's requirements.

In Slovenia, instructions explicitly constitute a form of discrimination (PADA, Article 7, indent 2). Since discrimination is prohibited in line with Article 4(2) of the PADA, consequently instructions, as a form of discrimination, are also prohibited.

⁵¹ Code of Obligations (*Obligacijski zakonik*), 3 October 2001, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1263.

Instructions to discriminate are also prohibited by the Employment Relationship Act. Article 6(3) of the Act states that instructions to discriminate also constitute direct or indirect discrimination, which is prohibited by law. However, instructions to discriminate are not mentioned in the Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

In 2021, the Administrative Court annulled a 2019 decision of the Advocate in which religious discrimination was found in the form of instructions to discriminate. The case was returned to the Advocate for a repeated procedure. In 2022, the Advocate repeated the procedure and took into account the Administrative Court's instructions. The Advocate again found the violation of Article 9 of the PADA by giving 'instructions to discriminate'. For more information about the case, see case law in section 12.2 below.

In addition to instructions to discriminate, the law prohibits incitement to discrimination. According to Article 10 of the PADA, incitement to discrimination means any kind of encouragement of other persons to engage in acts, the consequences of which is, was or could have been discrimination. Aggravated forms of such incitement include stating or spreading calls to differentiation based on race, religion or gender; abetting or instigating hatred and discrimination; and wider public calls that encourage discrimination. Defining it as a form of discrimination, the law also prohibits the public condoning of the disregarding or despising of people or groups based on any personal characteristics from Article 1 of the PADA as well as justifying ideas about the supremacy or superiority of people or groups with certain characteristics that derive from the stated personal characteristics over those who are not members of such groups.

It is relevant to add that incitement to hatred is defined and prohibited by the Penal Code. Article 297(1) states that anyone who publicly encourages or incites hatred, violence or intolerance based on national, racial, religious or ethnic origin, sex, skin colour, origin, property status, education, social status, political or other opinion, disability, sexual orientation or any other personal characteristic, and when the act is committed in a manner that may endanger or disturb public order and peace, or by use of threat, abuse or insult, shall be sanctioned with imprisonment of up to two years. In addition, Article 20 of the Protection of Public Order Act⁵² sets out the punishment for inciting ethnic, racial, gender, religious or political intolerance or intolerance related to sexual orientation.

b) Scope of liability for instructions to discriminate

In Slovenia, the instructor and the discriminator are liable. However, this is not explicitly defined in the law, however it can be derived from the law, as the law does not exclude liability of the discriminator if the instructor is liable, and *vice versa*. The Protection Against Discrimination Act defines in general terms the scope of liability for discriminatory treatment. According to the general principles of liability for damages defined in the Code of Obligations, an individual who has caused damage must compensate for it unless they can prove that they were not responsible for it (e.g. that there are circumstances that alleviate the responsibility of the person for the damage he or she caused). The question remains as to how these provisions would be interpreted by courts in cases in which damages arose due to unlawful discrimination.

⁵² Protection of Public Order Act (*Zakon o varstvu javnega reda in miru*), 22 June 2006, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3891.

2.8 Reasonable accommodation duties (Article 2(2)(b)(ii) and Article 5 Directive 2000/78)

- a) Implementation of the duty to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities in the area of employment

In Slovenia, the duty on employers to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities in the field of employment is not explicitly included in the law in full compliance with the directive, and it is not defined. The legal framework in Slovenia is particularly fragmented and unclear with regard to the duty to provide reasonable accommodation in employment. Further case law would therefore be highly useful to clarify the state of the law.

The duty to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities is not mentioned or defined in the Protection Against Discrimination Act; neither is it defined in the Employment Relationship Act. Although there is no specific reference to reasonable accommodation in these two laws, failure to provide reasonable accommodation could result in direct or indirect discrimination. Employees with disabilities would not be in the same position as other employees, and thus Article 6 of the Employment Relationship Act and Article 2 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act would be breached, since Article 2(1) of the PADA lists disability as a prohibited ground of discrimination.

The duty of reasonable accommodation is, however, defined in Article 3(3) of the 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. In this Act, the term 'reasonable accommodation' is replaced by 'appropriate accommodation' which, in accordance with Article 3(3), means 'necessary legislative, administrative and other measures which do not represent an unreasonable burden, that are needed *in a specific case* in order to ensure for persons with disabilities the enjoyment and realisation of their rights and freedoms'.

Even though the 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities regulates reasonable accommodation beyond employment, the measure provided for in this law that is also relevant for employment involves accepting and making available written material for an individual with sensory impairments in a manner that is appropriate for and chosen by them (e.g. Braille, large print, audio tape or electronic format) (Article 7(2)).

Other measures referred to in the Act on Equal Opportunities include accessibility measures. However, such measures can only be taken in relation to the accessibility of information in the workplace and the physical accessibility of the workplace (as the 2010 Act does not generally mention the field of employment).

There are also provisions in other laws that could constitute measures to provide reasonable accommodation, such as those in the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act.⁵³ Article 1(1) states that the Act defines the right to vocational rehabilitation and various aspects of employment for persons with disabilities. Article 2 states that the aim of the Act is to increase opportunities for persons with disabilities to be employed and to establish the circumstances for them to participate equally in the labour market by eliminating obstacles and creating equal opportunities. Article 4 stipulates that vocational rehabilitation services are services provided with the aim of training persons with disabilities for appropriate work, of helping them to obtain and retain employment and to progress within it or change career. Article 5 prohibits direct and indirect discrimination in the employment of persons with disabilities, both during employment and in relation to the termination of employment, as well as during procedures pursuant to this Act. Article 36(1) states that persons with disabilities can be employed either in an ordinary working environment, in companies for persons with disabilities or in supported and sheltered employment. All of these relate to work that suits their abilities. The provisions

⁵³ Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act (*Zakon o poklicni rehabilitaciji in zaposlovanju invalidov*), 21 May 2004, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3841.

of this law protect only those whose disability is attested by a medical certificate, in accordance with the Pension and Disability Insurance Act, and who are classed in one of three categories according to their capacity for work (those in Category I are not capable of working, while those in Categories II and III are able to work, subject to certain limitations or after rehabilitation). The personal scope of the relevant provisions of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act is limited, and the Act does not use the terminology of 'reasonable accommodation'.

If an individual employee has a disability but does not meet the definition under the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act and is not granted one of the disability statuses (categories), they can also rely on the (limited) duty of reasonable accommodation found in the 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities – under Article 5, the provisions of the Act may also be used in the context of the prohibition of discrimination if they are more favourable to the person with disabilities.⁵⁴

Article 15 of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act states that services promoting employment rehabilitation (carried out by service providers who have obtained a licence to perform this activity from the ministry with responsibility for social policy) include, *inter alia*, an analysis of the particular position and working environment of an individual with disabilities in order to produce a plan for making appropriate adjustments. This plan includes necessary equipment; training for a job or profession; expert assistance with training and education; shadowing the individual with disabilities at work after they have been employed; evaluating the success of the rehabilitation process; evaluating the extent to which employment goals have been reached; and providing other employment rehabilitation services.

The Minister of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities decides the amount payable for those services, which are financed from the national budget, the Fund for Promoting the Employment of Persons with Disabilities and other sources. Article 72 of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act states that the employer can lodge an application to obtain a refund from the Fund for the costs entailed in adapting a workstation to meet the needs of a persons with disabilities. This funding is available only for accommodations that benefit people who have been officially recognised as disabled. The Fund decides whether to refund the costs, and appeals are decided by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

The costs of supporting employment are decided in the same way. The employer must produce an individual plan of support for the person with disabilities.

Article 6 of the Employment Relationship Act enumerates disability and state of health among other grounds on which discrimination is prohibited and makes a distinction between the two. Article 195 of the Act states that the employer must protect persons with disabilities in relation to employment, vocational training and retraining, in accordance with the provisions in the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act and in line with the provisions of the Pension and Disability Insurance Act. This provision in fact means that only people who have disability status may claim reasonable accommodation, as far as the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act is interpreted as providing for reasonable accommodation duties. Article 196 of the Employment Relationship Act, which defines the rights of workers with disabilities, states that anyone who employs a worker who becomes disabled but still has the capacity to work must provide that worker with the opportunity to perform other appropriate work that suits their capacity, shorter working time, vocational rehabilitation and an allowance substituting for pay, in accordance with pension and disability insurance provisions. This option is available only for accommodations that benefit people who have been officially recognised as disabled under the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled

⁵⁴ Supreme Court of the Republic of Slovenia, judgment No. X Ips 362/2013, 8 July 2015.

Persons Act. The employer's duty to provide reasonable accommodation could also be derived from Article 196 of the Employment Relationship Act, but only to a certain extent.

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act allows an employer to terminate an employment contract with a person with disability due to redundancy or incapacity to carry out the work due to disability (Article 40). In this case, the employer must offer the employee another permanent employment contract for other suitable work which corresponds to the professional education, qualifications and work capacity of the person with disabilities, or based on an agreement with another employer, ensure that the other employer offers the person with disabilities a permanent employment contract for a suitable job there. This means that reasonable accommodation considerations will have to be taken into account when offering a new contract for work in a different post and in relation to the termination of the original employment.

In the Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, there are no specific rules on what kind of accommodation is considered to constitute a disproportionate burden. In order to assess this, account must be taken of the size and financial resources of the public or private entity concerned; its nature and the estimated expenses of the appropriate accommodation; the potential benefits of improved access for persons with disabilities; and the historical, cultural, artistic and architectural value of the building where the employment is based (Article 8).

Under this Act, a system was established to enable persons with disabilities to obtain state funding for technical equipment (in addition to that which is available through other disability legislation) that they require outside the area of employment in order to overcome communication or physical barriers, with the aim of establishing a safe and independent life, access to information and communication and the adjustment of living conditions and modifications to their cars (Articles 17 to 24). This Act does not constitute a reasonable accommodation duty in the field of employment (employment is covered by the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act; see below). The rights under this Act are available to a broader group of persons with disabilities and not only to those who have been officially recognised as such.

According to a study from 2009, in practice 94 % of all reasonable accommodation measures taken by employers are related to organisational solutions, such as transfers to other work posts, part-time work and protected employment posts.⁵⁵ In addition, 5 % of reasonable accommodation measures consist of rehabilitation and training, and less than 1 % are measures involving technical solutions. A more recent study is not available.

It is not yet clear whether not abiding by accessibility rules would violate the duty of reasonable accommodation, as there is as yet no case law on this issue.

It is also not yet clear how the availability of financial assistance from the state will be taken into account in assessing whether there is a disproportionate burden. The CRPD, as a directly applicable international convention, could be used in addressing this question judicially.

b) Case law

In one instance, the court dealt with a case concerning discrimination that occurred in the workplace, where an employer did not provide reasonable accommodation for the victim.⁵⁶ The Court found that 'the defendant's failure to provide the applicant with the necessary and appropriate accommodations to enable him, as a person with disability, to exercise his

⁵⁵ Tabaj, A. et al. (2009), *Izvajanje koncepta primerne prilagoditve – Reasonable accommodation na področju zaposlovanja invalidov* [Implementation of the concept of reasonable appropriate accommodation in the field of employment of persons with disabilities], University Rehabilitation Institute Soča.

⁵⁶ High Labour and Social Court, decision No. Pdp 915/2008, 14 May 2008.

rights and obligations in the employment relationship on an equal basis infringes the principle of non-discriminatory treatment and the claim for damages is well-founded in principle. It is essential for an understanding of the principle of non-discrimination, which goes beyond the mere formal framework of equality, and that the requirement of non-discrimination implies at the same time the requirement of the exercise of special legal positions or special rights and positive measures aimed at preventing certain individuals from being placed in a less favourable position. This is the principle of equal opportunities, i.e. the exercise of differentiated equality, which involves, to a certain extent, the prevention of actual or indirect discrimination.’ The applicant, who was blind and worked as a teacher, claimed that his employer did not enable normal work conditions because it did not provide him with more modern computer equipment (with Braille bar), thus placing him at a disadvantage compared with the rest of the teaching staff.

c) Definition of disability and non-discrimination protection

National law differentiates in terms of personal scope with regard to the definitions of disability for the purposes of obtaining disability status,⁵⁷ claiming protection from discrimination or claiming reasonable accommodation.⁵⁸ The Protection Against Discrimination Act does not contain a definition of disability, nor does it contain a reasonable accommodation duty. The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act only provides for a de facto reasonable accommodation duty (without using this terminology) for those people who have been officially recognised as disabled. The Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities contains a definition of disability based on the text of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and this definition is used for securing protection from discrimination under the Act, as well as for asserting the right to request a reasonable accommodation under the Act (taking into account that this duty is very limited and not explicitly defined in the field of employment).

It remains to be seen which definition will be adopted by the courts for the purposes of protection from discrimination on the grounds of disability. In the event, it will be important to take into account Article 5 of the Act on Equal Opportunities for persons with Disabilities, which states that the provisions of the Act can also be used in the context of the prohibition of discrimination if they are more favourable to the person with disabilities.

d) Failure to meet the duty of reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities

In Slovenia, failure to meet the duty of reasonable accommodation in employment for persons with disabilities is not explicitly recognised as a form of discrimination. Judicial interpretation is required to confirm that failure to provide reasonable accommodation counts as discrimination.

Even though the Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities defines the duty of reasonable accommodation, it does not explicitly provide an overall rule that denying reasonable accommodation (or appropriate accommodation, as the law calls it) constitutes discrimination. The same goes for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act, which also does not provide a rule that denying reasonable accommodation constitutes discrimination. However, the sole fact that the duty of appropriate accommodation is defined in the Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities could strengthen the argument that denial of it would constitute discrimination. There is, for example, a specific provision which states that discrimination on the ground

⁵⁷ In accordance with Article 60 of the Pension and Disability Insurance Act, employees with disabilities are classed in one of three categories, according to their capacity for work. Those in category I are not capable of work, while those in categories II and III are able to work, subject to certain limitations or after rehabilitation.

⁵⁸ Under the 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, persons with disabilities are those who have long-term physical, mental or sensory impairments or impairments to their mental development which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

of disability includes not ensuring access to information for persons with disabilities, taking into account the duty of appropriate or reasonable accommodation (Article 14 of the Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities).

If failure to provide reasonable accommodation was considered as an act of discrimination (e.g. by a court or inspectorate), the same sanctions would apply as in cases of discrimination (see below, section on sanctions).

There are no special provisions in law on the burden of proof in cases of claiming discrimination due to denial of reasonable accommodation. The shift of the burden of proof as applied in discrimination cases generally applies in such cases as well.

e) Duties to provide reasonable accommodation in areas other than employment for persons with disabilities

In Slovenia, there is a legal duty to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities outside the area of employment.

The Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities also makes provision for the duty of appropriate accommodation outside the area of employment, in particular in the area of access to goods and services. Measures of appropriate accommodation and accessibility measures can include:

- accepting and making available written material for an individual with sensory impairments in a manner that is appropriate for and chosen by them (e.g. Braille, large print, audio tape or electronic format) (Article 7(2));
- ensuring access to information, communication and other services in case of emergency, removal of structural barriers in buildings where goods and services are made available to the public (Article 8(3));
- the adaptation of public buildings with structural solutions and technical equipment, sound and sensory indicators, written information and other reasonable adjustments (Article 9(2));
- appropriate accommodation measures for inclusion in educational and study processes, including adjustments to meet the educational and study needs of an individual with disabilities (Article 11(2));
- the duty of local government to ensure that adapted non-profit apartments are made available for persons with disabilities who apply for and are granted non-profit apartments (Article 13);
- accessibility of information through different types of scripts and technologies, appropriate for different types of disabilities (Article 14);
- access to public cultural events by eliminating communication and structural barriers (Article 15(2));
- the duty to make public transport accessible for people with physical and sensory impairments, and the prohibition on charging extra for a wheelchair or a guide dog (Article 16);
- the right to state co-financing for the purchase of a new adapted vehicle (Article 21(4));
- the right to acquire a therapeutic dog (Article 22.c).

Some of these measures are general accessibility duties, and they lack the individual reactive element found in a reasonable accommodation duty. Other reasonable accommodation measures can be taken in addition to the above examples.

On 1 January 2019, the Act Regulating the Integrated Early Treatment of Preschool Children with Special Needs⁵⁹ became applicable, de facto introducing reasonable accommodation for children with special needs in pre-school education. Pre-school special needs determination was added to school special needs determination, which already existed, and is regulated under the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act.⁶⁰ These two acts can also be considered as also providing for reasonable accommodation outside employment – namely, in education.

In 2022, the Advocate found that the Music Schools Act⁶¹ was discriminatory because it lacked a provision that children with disabilities who want to go to music school must be provided with reasonable accommodations when taking the entrance exams. Only if such adjustments were made would these children be placed on an equal footing with their non-disabled peers. The Advocate recommended that the Ministry of Education eliminate the discrimination that was found.⁶²

f) Duties to provide reasonable accommodation in respect of other grounds

Section 2.8.f has not been updated for 2022. Please see Country report Non-discrimination Slovenia 2022, Transposition and implementation at national level of Council directives 2000/43 and 2000/78, reporting period 1.1.2021 – 1.1.2022.

⁵⁹ Act Regulating the Integrated Early Treatment of Preschool Children with Special Needs (*Zakon o celostni zgodnji obravnavi predšolskih otrok s posebnimi potrebami*), 14 July 2017, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7681>.

⁶⁰ Placement of Children with Special Needs Act (*Zakon o usmerjanju otrok s posebnimi potrebami*), 12 July 2011, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5896.

⁶¹ Music Schools Act (*Zakon o glasbenih šolah*), 17 February 2000, available at: <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO2063>.

⁶² Advocate of the Principle of Equality, decision No. 050-38/2021/18, 10 June 2022.

3 PERSONAL AND MATERIAL SCOPE

3.1 Personal scope

3.1.1 EU and non-EU nationals (Recital 13 and Article 3(2), Directive 2000/43 and Recital 12 and Article 3(2), Directive 2000/78)

In Slovenia, there are no residence or citizenship/nationality requirements for protection under the relevant national laws transposing the directives. Hence, anyone, including undocumented migrants or those with irregular status, is entitled to the protection of the directives.

3.1.2 Natural and legal persons (Recital 16, Directive 2000/43)

a) Protection against discrimination

In Slovenia, the personal scope of anti-discrimination law covers natural and legal persons for the purpose of protection against discrimination.

The Protection Against Discrimination Act does not distinguish between natural persons and legal persons in ensuring equal treatment. Article 1(1) states that 'this Act defines protection of each individual from discrimination', and Article 1(3) continues by stating that protection from discrimination is also applicable to legal persons 'if the grounds that could be a basis for discrimination can be attributed to legal persons'. The preparatory materials in relation to the Protection Against Discrimination Act indicate that legal persons can enjoy protection from discrimination if they are discriminated against because of personal grounds in relation to their members, founders or management. The Advocate of the Principle of Equality has already decided cases in which it found that legal persons had been discriminated against.⁶³ As for groups of persons, the term 'a person' cannot be interpreted as precluding a group of people who have been discriminated against from bringing a complaint, as long as each individual is identified.

Article 6 of the Employment Relationship Act does not specify whether both natural and legal persons are covered (it just states 'person'). However, since only natural persons can be employed, they are the only ones who can be protected under this law.

b) Liability for discrimination

In Slovenia, the personal scope of anti-discrimination law covers natural and legal persons for the purpose of liability for discrimination.

Liability for discrimination is established by Article 39 (civil liability) and Article 45 (misdemeanour liability) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act and Article 229 of the Employment Relationship Act. The law differs in respect of the misdemeanour liability of natural persons and the liability of legal persons for harm caused by acts of discrimination. While there are no differences in establishing misdemeanour liability as such, there is a significant difference in the amount prescribed in law for fines that are payable by the party that is found to be in breach of anti-discrimination provisions. When the act of discrimination amounts to a criminal offence, Article 4 of the Liability of Legal Persons for Criminal Offences Act⁶⁴ states that for a criminal offence, which the perpetrator committed in the name, on the account of or for the benefit of a legal person, the legal person is also liable.

⁶³ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, decision No. 0700-2/2019, 4 July 2019, and decision No. 0700-11/2019, 18 July 2019.

⁶⁴ Liability of Legal Persons for Criminal Offences Act (*Zakon o odgovornosti pravnih oseb za kazniva dejanja*), 8 July 1999, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1259.

According to Article 13 of the Liability of Legal Persons for Criminal Offences Act, criminal offences committed by legal persons are subject to a fine ranging from EUR 10 000 to EUR 1 000 000, or up to the value of the damage caused or pecuniary advantage obtained, multiplied by 200. Instead of paying a fine, the legal person can also be dissolved in cases where the activity of the legal person was wholly or predominantly abused for the purpose of perpetrating the criminal offence. The same measure is prescribed for criminal offences against the employment relationship and social security, defined in Articles 205, 206 and 209 of the Penal Code. While a natural person, as defined in the Penal Code, shall be punished with a fine or imprisonment (see Section 6.5; Sanctions and Remedies), sanctions for legal persons for the same criminal offences involve fines or the dissolution of the legal person.

3.1.3 Private and public sector including public bodies (Article 3(1))

a) Protection against discrimination

In Slovenia, the personal scope of national law covers the private and public sectors, including public bodies, for the purpose of protection against discrimination.

Article 2(1) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act states that this law is binding on state bodies, local communities and holders of public authority, as well as legal and natural persons who are responsible for ensuring protection from discrimination in all fields of exercising public authority, participation in legal transactions and all other areas of their activities. Accordingly, the law makes no distinction between the sectors, which means that it applies to both the private and public sectors, including public bodies. In addition, Article 6 of the Employment Relationship Act does not specify whether both the private and public sectors are covered (it just states 'person'). However, since neither of the two are excluded, the conclusion should be drawn that both are covered by law. There is a special Public Servants Act, but it defines only those aspects of employment that are specific to public service. For all matters not regulated by the Public Servants Act, the Employment Relationship Act (including its anti-discrimination provisions) should be used. The provisions are in accordance with the directives.

b) Liability for discrimination

In Slovenia, the personal scope of anti-discrimination law covers the private and public sectors, including public bodies, for the purpose of liability for discrimination.

The liability provisions of the Protection Against Discrimination Act (Articles 39 and 45) and the Employment Relationship Act (Article 229) do not differentiate between the private and public sectors. According to Article 2 of the Liability of Legal Persons for Criminal Offences Act, the Republic of Slovenia and local authorities, as legal persons, are not liable for criminal offences.

3.2 Material scope

3.2.1 Conditions for access to employment, to self-employment or to occupation, including selection criteria, recruitment conditions and promotion, whatever the branch of activity and at all levels of the professional hierarchy (Article 3(1)(a))

In Slovenia, national legislation prohibits discrimination in relation to conditions for access to employment, self-employment or occupation, including selection criteria, recruitment conditions and promotion, whatever the branch of activity and at all levels of the professional hierarchy, for the five directive grounds and grounds beyond the directives, in both the private and public sectors as described in the directives.

Article 2(1), indent 1, of the Protection Against Discrimination Act (applicable to both the public and private sectors) stipulates that, in access to employment, self-employment and occupation, including selection criteria and recruitment conditions, whatever the branch of activity and at all levels of the professional hierarchy, equal treatment is guaranteed irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic. While gender identity and gender expression are explicitly listed, sex characteristics are not. However, as the Protection Against Discrimination Act contains an open-ended list of grounds, sex characteristics should also be covered by its provisions.

Similarly, Articles 6(1) and 6(2) of the Employment Relationship Act stipulate that equal treatment must be ensured for employees by the employer in, *inter alia*, recruitment and promotion. The 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which prohibits discrimination on the ground of disability, does not refer explicitly to the field of employment (the material scope of the Act is education and access to and supply of goods and services that are available to the public, including housing). The main legal basis for the provision of reasonable accommodation in employment (for persons with disability status) remains the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act; this Act does not prohibit discrimination (on the ground of disability) in access to employment, self-employment and occupation.

Access to employment is generally the same for the public sector with regard to anti-discrimination provisions, but there are some provisions that relate to the recruitment process which differ from the provisions in the Employment Relationship Act. According to Article 7 of the Civil Servants Act, all civil servants will be chosen through a public competition. In the course of a public tender, all candidates must be treated equally, and only professional qualifications should be considered in hiring an employee in the public sector.

Article 29 of the Civil Servants Act regulates the promotion of employees. It specifically states that when assessing a candidate for promotion, only qualifications and other professional skills should be considered, in addition to the quality of the employee's work. Both the Employment Relationship Act and the Protection Against Discrimination Act apply to civil servants, but the Civil Servants Act is *lex specialis* and therefore regulates certain conditions for access to employment in the public sector differently, as described. Even though the Protection Against Discrimination Act (which covers both the private and public sectors) and the Employment Relationship Act apply to the public sector, the public and private sectors are not dealt with entirely in the same way, as the Civil Servants Act contains some additional specific provisions about selection criteria, recruitment and promotion that are compatible with the objectives of the directives.

The Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities provides for reasonable accommodation duties in the areas of accessibility of information and physical accessibility of public buildings, which can be relevant to employment.

Conditions for access to self-employment are defined in the Companies Act (which does not contain an anti-discrimination clause).⁶⁵ Conditions for self-employment from Article 71 onwards are unrelated to the personal grounds of individuals. The prohibition of discrimination in access to self-employment is defined in Article 2(1), indent 1, of the Protection Against Discrimination Act.

3.2.2 Employment and working conditions, including pay and dismissals (Article 3(1)(c))

In Slovenia, national legislation prohibits discrimination in working conditions, including pay and dismissals, for all five grounds contained in the directives and more, in both private and public employment.

The Protection Against Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic in the field of, *inter alia*, employment and working conditions, including dismissals and pay (Article 2(1), indent 3). While gender identity and gender expression are explicitly listed, sex characteristics are not. However, as the Protection Against Discrimination Act contains an open-ended list of grounds, sex characteristics should also be covered by its provisions.

Employment and working conditions are further regulated by the Employment Relationship Act. The anti-discrimination clause in Article 6 refers explicitly to the course of employment, payment and other income from employment, absence, working conditions, working time and termination of employment contracts. Under Article 90 of the Employment Relationship Act, race, ethnicity and ethnic origin, skin colour, gender, age, disability, marital status, family obligations, pregnancy, religious and political belief, ethnic and social origin cannot be admitted as reasonable grounds for terminating an employment contract. Sexual orientation is not on this list; however, this does not mean that termination of employment due to an individual's sexual orientation is allowed, as discrimination on this ground is prohibited in Article 6 of the Employment Relationship Act. There is no practical or legal significance in excluding sexual orientation from this list. Gender identity and gender expression or sex characteristics are also not listed in Article 90 of the Employment Relationship Act, nor are they explicitly mentioned in Article 6. However, the list of personal circumstances in Article 6 of the Employment Relationship Act is open-ended, referring to 'other personal circumstances in accordance with this Act, the provisions on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment and the provisions on equal opportunities for women and men'.

As a result of the Civil Union Act, which equalises all legal consequences of same-sex partnerships with those of opposite sex partnerships, civil partners are covered by 'marital status' and 'family obligations'.

Although the Employment Relationship Act does not include any special provisions regarding equal pay in relation to the five grounds, such a claim is possible under Article 6. The Act also states that provisions included in individual and collective agreements or employers' rules relating to professional activity that are contrary to the principle of equal pay are null and void.

⁶⁵ Companies Act (*Zakon o gospodarskih družbah*), 4 April 2006, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4291>.

In a landmark case, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia adopted a decision on the protection of rights related to dismissal.⁶⁶ After working for a factory for many years (between 24 and 35 years) the claimants were registered as Category III disabled, which gave them the right to part-time work and a partial disability pension. After two and four years respectively, they were made redundant by the employer. The Constitutional Court found in favour of the claimants, considering that they were treated unequally in comparison with other workers who had worked for the company for a similar number of years and were made redundant when they still worked full-time, and who consequently received severance pay that was twice the amount that the complainants received. The Constitutional Court stated that the complainants' contribution to the company was similar to that of other workers. While the Court did not explicitly state as much, the case could be viewed in the context of indirect discrimination on the grounds of disability.

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act provides for reasonable accommodation measures in the workplace for people who have a disability status. The Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities provides for reasonable accommodation duties in employment in the areas of accessibility of information and physical accessibility of public buildings.

3.2.3 Access to all types and all levels of vocational guidance, vocational training, advanced vocational training and retraining, including practical work experience (Article 3(1)(b))

In Slovenia, national legislation prohibits discrimination in vocational training outside the employment relationship, such as adult lifelong learning courses or vocational training provided by technical schools or universities.

In accordance with the Protection Against Discrimination Act, equal treatment is guaranteed irrespective of personal characteristics in access to all types and all levels of career orientation, vocational and professional education and training, and advanced vocational training and retraining, including practical work experience (Article 2(1), indent 2). The Act does not differentiate between different types of training and education with respect to where knowledge was acquired. In Article 1(1) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, gender identity and gender expression are explicitly listed, but sex characteristics are not. However, as the Protection Against Discrimination Act contains an open-ended list of grounds, sex characteristics should also be covered by its provisions.

The Employment Relationship Act prohibits discrimination in the field of vocational training (Article 6 (2)) on the grounds of ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, national and social origin, gender, skin colour, health condition, disability, religion or belief, age, sexual orientation, family status, membership in a trade union, financial situation or other personal circumstance. Gender identity and gender expression or sex characteristics are not explicitly mentioned in Article 6(2). However, its list of personal circumstances is open-ended, referring to 'other personal circumstances in accordance with this Act, the provisions on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment and the provisions on equal opportunities for women and men'.

The 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which prohibits discrimination on the ground of disability, does not refer explicitly to the field of vocational training; however, in Article 11, it sets out the reasonable accommodation duty in the field of education and lifelong learning, which includes vocational training. This Act also applies to vocational training-related reasonable accommodation duties in the areas of accessibility of information and physical accessibility of public buildings.

⁶⁶ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, decision No. Up-109/12-18, 23 January 2014.

The duty to provide reasonable accommodation in access to vocational training is not defined in law.

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act provides for reasonable accommodation measures in the workplace for people who have a disability status.

3.2.4 Membership of, and involvement in, an organisation of workers or employers, or any organisation whose members carry on a particular profession, including the benefits provided for by such organisations (Article 3(1)(d))

In Slovenia, national legislation prohibits discrimination in relation to membership of and involvement in workers' or employers' organisations, as formulated in the directives for all five grounds and beyond, in both private and public employment.

In accordance with the Protection Against Discrimination Act, equal treatment is guaranteed irrespective of personal characteristics in relation to membership of and involvement in an organisation of workers or employers, or any organisation whose members carry on a particular profession, including the benefits provided by such organisations (Article 2(1), indent 4).

The protected grounds include gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic. While gender identity and gender expression are explicitly listed as protected grounds, sex characteristics are not. However, as the Protection Against Discrimination Act contains an open-ended list of protected grounds, sex characteristics should also be covered by its provisions.

The duty to provide reasonable accommodation in the field of membership of, and involvement in, an organisation of workers or employers is not defined in law.

The Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities provides for reasonable accommodation duties in the areas of accessibility of information and physical accessibility of public buildings.

3.2.5 Social protection, including social security and healthcare (Article 3(1)(e) Directive 2000/43)

In Slovenia, national legislation prohibits discrimination in social protection, including social security and healthcare, as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive.

In accordance with the Protection Against Discrimination Act, equal treatment is guaranteed irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic, in all areas, including social protection, social security and healthcare (Article 2(1), indent 5). While gender identity and gender expression are explicitly listed as protected grounds, sex characteristics are not. However, as the Protection Against Discrimination Act contains an open-ended list of protected grounds, sex characteristics should also be covered by its provisions.

Social security, which covers the prevention and resolution of problems connected to the social situation of individuals, families and groups, is regulated through the Social Security Act. Article 4 sets out the principle of equal access to social security services for all beneficiaries under the conditions set by law. The beneficiaries are Slovenian citizens with

permanent residence in Slovenia and foreigners with a residence permit in Slovenia. Slovenian citizens who do not have permanent residence in Slovenia and foreigners without a permanent residence permit are entitled only to certain limited services provided by the Social Security Act in certain cases and under the conditions set out by this Act.

For the purposes of the Social Security Act, the term 'families' is inclusive of same-sex families (whether or not constituted by a civil partnership). The Civil Union Act equalises all legal consequences of same-sex partnerships with those of opposite sex partnerships for the purposes of social security, as well as all legal consequences of de facto different-sex couples with those of de facto same-sex partners.⁶⁷

The Social Assistance Benefits Act⁶⁸ regulates the entitlement to financial social assistance, which is recognised for those individuals who are not able to secure their material security due to circumstances they cannot influence (Article 2). The right to financial social assistance is accorded to Slovenian citizens with permanent residence in Slovenia, foreigners with a residence permit in Slovenia and others who are accorded this right on the basis of international agreements which are binding on Slovenia (Article 3).

The Parental Protection and Family Benefit Act⁶⁹ regulates insurance for parental protection and family benefits.⁷⁰ The Pension and Disability Insurance Act regulates the compulsory pension and disability insurance system on the basis of intergenerational solidarity. The criteria for determining claims for family benefits and insurance for pension and disability insurance are neutral. Social security provisions are generally not subject to age limits. However, should a person seeking protection be a minor or a student (and be under the age of 26), the question of whether they are eligible to receive some form of financial assistance is determined by examining the social situation of those people with the duty to provide for them (usually parents). There are no other age limitations.⁷¹

The right of any person to healthcare under conditions established by law is a constitutionally guaranteed right. The Healthcare and Health Insurance Act⁷² does not contain an explicit provision on discrimination in access to healthcare. It only neutrally defines categories of insurance, with certain rights resulting from this insurance. Article 2 introduces a broad provision that everyone has a right to healthcare and a duty to contribute to it according to their means. The Health Services Act⁷³ deals with the content and presence of health services, which can be performed as public or private health services. When carrying out their duties, health workers are obliged to treat all people in the same circumstances equally and to respect their constitutional and lawful rights. The only priority allowed is when a person's medical condition necessitates urgent treatment.

⁶⁷ The law does not define what evidence de facto couples need to show to constitute de facto partnership. That depends on an individual procedure in which the court or another competent body decides on the rights recognised for de facto partners. In practice, courts look at whether the couple lives together; whether partners support each other financially and emotionally and share living expenses; and whether the couple has children or takes care of children together, etc.

⁶⁸ Social Assistance Benefits Act (*Zakon o socialno varstvenih prejemkih*), 13 July 2010, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5609.

⁶⁹ Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act (*Zakon o starševskem varstvu in družinskih prejemkih*), 3 April 2014, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO6688.

⁷⁰ The exclusion of joint adoption has no impact on existing same-sex families, not even those that were formed though joint adoption undertaken abroad. In such cases, the courts already recognised such adoption through a recognition of foreign judgments procedure.

⁷¹ The Parental Protection and Family Benefit Act contains several rights that derive from marital status (such as the right to parental leave). All these rights are recognised not only for spouses and de facto opposite-sex partners but, since 24 March 2017, also for same-sex partners, regardless of whether they have entered into civil unions.

⁷² Health Care and Health Insurance Act (*Zakon o zdravstvenem varstvu in zdravstvenem zavarovanju*), 12 February 1992, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO213.

⁷³ Health Services Act (*Zakon o zdravstveni dejavnosti*), 12 February 1992, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO214.

The 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which prohibits discrimination on the ground of disability, does not refer explicitly to the field of social protection and healthcare, except for the duty to provide reasonable accommodation in relation to access to public buildings and accessibility of information.

A problem that requires attention relates to Article 8a of the Labour Market Regulation Act,⁷⁴ which was amended in 2020. The provisions state that a third-country national who registers at the unemployment office as a job seeker has to learn the Slovenian language (level A1) in the 12 months following registration. If the person fails to meet this condition, they are erased from the registry (Article 129 and consequently they are no longer eligible for social assistance. This cannot be justified under recital (13) of the Race Equality Directive, which allows for differences in treatment based on nationality and for specific rules governing the entry and residence of third-country nationals and their access to employment and to occupation. In the view of the author, this new provision raises an issue of potential indirect discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnicity in access to social security.

A problem which also requires attention is the issue of non-profit housing, as defined by the Housing Act.⁷⁵ In order to rent a social (non-profit) apartment, people must fulfil general conditions, such as citizenship, permanent residence in the area where the apartment is located and confirmation of their income and the income of their family members. For other types of lease, landlords may add even more conditions that have to be satisfied in order to lease a particular apartment. Such conditions could lead to potential discrimination on the basis of certain personal characteristics – for example, for Roma; however, there is no research available to confirm whether this is the case in practice.

a) Article 3(3) exception (Directive 2000/78)

National law does not rely on the exception in Article 3(3) of the Directive 2000/78/EC.

3.2.6 Social advantages (Article 3(1)(f) Directive 2000/43)

In accordance with the Protection Against Discrimination Act, equal treatment is guaranteed irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic in the field of social advantages (Article 2(1), indent 6). While gender identity and gender expression are explicitly listed as protected grounds, sex characteristics are not. However, as the Protection Against Discrimination Act contains an open-ended list of protected grounds, sex characteristics should also be covered by its provisions. See also Sections 3.2.8 and 3.2.9.

The 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which prohibits discrimination on the ground of disability, does not refer explicitly to the field of social benefits, except for the duty to provide reasonable accommodation in relation to access to public buildings and accessibility of information.

⁷⁴ Labour Market Regulation Act (*Zakon o urejanju trga dela*), 28 September 2010, available at: <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5840>.

⁷⁵ Housing Act (*Stanovanjski zakon*), 19 June 2003, available at: [www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO2008](http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO2008).

3.2.7 Education (Article 3(1)(g) Directive 2000/43)

In Slovenia, national legislation prohibits discrimination in education as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive.

In accordance with the Protection Against Discrimination Act (Article 2(1), indent 7), equal treatment is guaranteed in the field of education irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic. While gender identity and gender expression are explicitly listed as protected grounds, sex characteristics are not. However, as the Protection Against Discrimination Act contains an open-ended list of protected grounds, sex characteristics should also be covered by its provisions.

The main piece of legislation on education is the Organisation and Financing of Education Act,⁷⁶ Article 2 of which guarantees individuals the opportunity to achieve optimum personal development regardless of their gender, social and cultural background, religion, racial, ethnic and national origin and physical and mental abilities or disability, and sets this standard as one of the goals in the upbringing and education of children. Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or sex characteristics are not explicitly mentioned among personal grounds in Article 2 of the Act.

Access to primary schooling is free for every child, regardless of their status,⁷⁷ while access to professional and occupational education⁷⁸ as well as access to high school⁷⁹ and higher education⁸⁰ is equal for all Slovenian citizens, for Slovenians without citizenship and for foreigners under the condition of reciprocity or otherwise under the condition that they bear the costs. EU nationals are not exempt from the reciprocity principle that is in place for foreigners. Primary school is mandatory for every child between the ages of six and 15.

Pre-school education, which takes place in kindergartens, is based on the principles of democracy and equal opportunities for children and parents, taking into consideration the differences between children and maintaining the balance between different aspects of a child's physical and mental growth.⁸¹

Special provisions apply to the children of Slovenian citizens who reside in Slovenia but whose mother tongue is not Slovenian. In accordance with international agreements, special lessons in their mother tongue and culture are organised, with the additional possibility of Slovenian lessons being organised.⁸² Children who are of foreign citizenship or who are stateless and reside in Slovenia have the right to compulsory primary school education on the same terms as Slovenian citizens.⁸³ For them, lessons in their mother tongue and culture are organised free of charge, through international agreements. If there is no agreement, there is no obligation for the school to provide for lessons in a child's mother tongue.

⁷⁶ Organisation and Financing of Education Act (*Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja*), 6 February 1996, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO445.

⁷⁷ Elementary School Act (*Zakon o osnovni šoli*), 14 February 1996, Article 10, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO448.

⁷⁸ Vocational and Technical Education Act (*Zakon o poklicnem in strokovnem izobraževanju*), 13 July 2006, Article 7, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4325.

⁷⁹ High School Act (*Zakon o gimnazijah*), 14 February 1996, Article 9, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO450.

⁸⁰ Higher Education Act (*Zakon o visokem šolstvu*), 7 December 1993, Article 7, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO172.

⁸¹ Kindergarten Act (*Zakon o vrtcih*), 14 February 1996, Article 3, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO447.

⁸² Elementary School Act (*Zakon o osnovni šoli*), 14 February 1996, Article 8, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO448.

⁸³ Elementary School Act, (*Zakon o osnovni šoli*), 14 February 1996, Article 10, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO448.

The provision of pre-school and primary school education, primary and secondary vocational education, secondary technical education, professional education and secondary general education for the Italian and Hungarian national minorities is regulated in the Special Rights for Members of the Italian and Hungarian National Minorities in the Field of Education Act.⁸⁴

There are reports and articles mentioning the existence of bullying in schools due to students' sexual orientation;⁸⁵ however, no comprehensive statistics are available.

The pandemic and associated school closure created numerous issues for pupils belonging to specific groups, such as Roma, children with disabilities, children whose parents have disabilities and other groups. The Advocate of the Principle of Equality carried out an assessment of discrimination in relation to the decrees, based on which schools were closed. It found that the closure of schools had negative consequences for vulnerable groups of children in particular (children with disabilities, children whose mother tongue is not Slovenian and immigrant children, children whose parents are not able to help them with distance learning due to disability or social status, students who do not have access to the internet due to socioeconomic status or due to place of residence).⁸⁶

In Slovenia, the general approach to education for pupils with disabilities gives rise to problems.

If children with disabilities are not able to follow the mainstream school programme, they can be enrolled in adapted programmes in special schools, in accordance with the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act.⁸⁷ They are still predominantly enrolled in special schools. The practice of evaluating children's abilities to follow the regular programme does not raise serious concerns. The inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools is an exception, and in practice depends on the willingness of the school to accept them. However, under Article 11 of the 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, there is a duty to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to inclusion in educational programmes at all levels in the area in which they live. The same article further stipulates that inclusion in special schools with adapted programmes does not constitute discrimination.

Children with disabilities who are enrolled in mainstream schools obtain a decision from the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia that specifies their rights depending on their disability.⁸⁸ These rights may include the right to special equipment or personal assistance. The school is not entitled to equipment, although it can pay for it from its own resources or can ask the municipality to pay for it. However, when children with disabilities are included in mainstream classes, the size of classes is smaller and the school is entitled to employ more staff (this system is similar to that which applies in respect of Roma children). However, in practice, in some special schools, segregated education is still favoured and supported, which is contrary to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons

⁸⁴ Special Rights for Members of the Italian and Hungarian Minorities in the Field of Education Act (*Zakon o posebnih pravicah pripadnikov italijanske in madžarske narodne skupnosti na področju izobraževanja*), 25 April 2001, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO2611.

⁸⁵ Sonja Pečjak (2014), 'Medvrstniško nasilje v šoli' (Peer Violence in Schools), Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, available at: https://issuu.com/znanstvenazalozbaff/docs/medvrstnisko_nasilje_v_soli; Doroteja M. Lešnik, Andrej Koren, Vinko Logaj, Mateja Brejc (2009), 'Nasilje v šolah: Opredelitev, prepoznavanje, preprečevanje in obvladovanje' (Violence in Schools: Definition, Recognition, Prevention and Management), Šola za ravnatelje, available at: www.solazaravnatelje.si/ISBN/978-961-6637-24-4.pdf.

⁸⁶ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, assessment of discrimination, No. 050-15/2021/56, 19 October 2021.

⁸⁷ Placement of Children with Special Needs Act (*Zakon o usmerjanju otrok s posebnimi potrebami*), 12 July 2011, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5896.

⁸⁸ Placement of Children with Special Needs Act (*Zakon o usmerjanju otrok s posebnimi potrebami*), 12 July 2011, Article 30, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5896.

with Disabilities. Children with disabilities have equal access to secondary education. Many university departments are accessible for students with disabilities.⁸⁹

a) Trends and patterns regarding Roma pupils

In Slovenia, there are specific trends and patterns (whether legal or societal) in education regarding Roma pupils, such as segregation.

The Kindergarten Act⁹⁰ and other regulations deal with the pre-school and primary school education of Roma children. In kindergartens they can be placed together with other children in mixed kindergarten classes or in special classes (which is possible only in the regions with large Roma populations), depending on a decision being made by the kindergarten, the municipality and the Centre for Social Work. Where a special class for Roma children is formed, the Decree on Standards and Employment Criteria in Pre-School Education⁹¹ (last amended on 20 July 2005) allows these classes to include a smaller number of children than other classes, as well as fewer children per teacher (Article 39 of the decree).

According to a report by the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner, Roma children continue to be underrepresented in pre-schools. The reason seems to be that many Roma families prefer not to enrol their children in pre-school in order to benefit from a 20 % bonus in child benefits aimed at compensating families that do not obtain a place in pre-school for their children.⁹² A project funded by the EU and the Ministry of Education that focused on pre-school for children aged three to six years old introduced educational 'incubators' in Roma settlements. The incubators are aimed at equipping Roma children with the skills necessary to their successful integration into elementary school, including speaking the Slovenian language.⁹³ In a subsequent project, the incubators evolved into so-called 'Roma centres'.⁹⁴ The project ended in 2021, but the Ministry of Education announced a new project to upgrade educational activities in Roma settlements, which will also include activities for pre-school children.⁹⁵

The tendency to integrate Roma children into mainstream classes has prevailed in the majority of primary schools, meaning that Roma children are no longer in separate schools or separate classes and formally there are no more separate schools and classes for the Roma.

The 2014 report by the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance – *ECRI Report on Slovenia (fourth monitoring cycle)* – does not note any Roma children without learning disabilities being sent to special schools. However, it states that '[while] the national average of children with special needs is 4 %, it is up 7 % in the case of Roma children'.⁹⁶ In its 2019 report, ECRI reiterates its concern on the disproportionately

⁸⁹ Association of Students with Disabilities, <http://www.dsis-drustvo.si/za-bodoce-studente/dostopnost-fakultet/>.

⁹⁰ Kindergarten Act (*Zakon o vrtcih*), 14 February 1996, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO447>.

⁹¹ Decree on Standards and Employment Criteria in Pre-School Education (*Odredba o normativih in kadrovskih pogojih za opravljanje dejavnosti predšolske vzgoje*), 15 September 1997, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ODRE357.

⁹² Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights (2017), *Report on Slovenia*, CommDH(2017)21, 11 July 2017, pp. 19-20, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-the-visit-to-slovenia-from-20-to-23-march-2017-by-nils-muizn/1680730405>.

⁹³ See <http://skupajdoznanja.si/romski-izobrazevalni-inkubatorji/>.

⁹⁴ Government of Slovenia (2020), *Sedmo poročilo Vlade Republike Slovenije o položaju romske skupnosti v Sloveniji* (Seventh Report of the Government of Republic of Slovenia on the Situation of Roma Community in Slovenia), 5 November 2020, available at: <https://www.gov.si teme/romska-skupnost/>.

⁹⁵ Government of Slovenia (2020), *Deveto poročilo Vlade Republike Slovenije o položaju romske skupnosti v Sloveniji* (Ninth Report of the Government of Republic of Slovenia on the Situation of Roma Community in Slovenia), 28 July 2022, available at: <https://www.gov.si teme/romska-skupnost/>.

⁹⁶ See: www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/slovenia/SVN-CbC-IV-2014-038-ENG.pdf.

high share of Roma children in special schools.⁹⁷ More recent data shows that, according to official statistics, Roma children continue to be overrepresented in special needs schools, with about 12.2 % of Roma children being directed to such schools in the school year 2017-18 in comparison with 6.18 % of other children.⁹⁸

Further, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its concluding observations in 2013, expressed concern over the fact that Roma children 'enjoy limited access to education and a high number of them are attending classes for children with special needs despite the Committee's previous recommendation.'⁹⁹ Similar findings are available in the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 2014.¹⁰⁰ The 2017 report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights also notes issues such as absenteeism from school, high drop-out rates in some regions and the very low numbers of Roma children who reach secondary and tertiary education in the country. The Commissioner reports the reasons identified for this as: insufficient value placed on education by families; poor housing conditions that do not allow families to make school a priority; early marriages and pregnancies; and criminality among teenage boys, induced by certain male figures from the community.¹⁰¹ Officially, segregation (schooling in separate classes) is no longer present, but de facto the situation is still not satisfactory.¹⁰²

Teachers, Roma children and parents generally acknowledge that many of the difficulties Roma children encounter in primary schools are due to language barriers. Many Roma children have no or limited command of the language spoken by the majority population. Other measures that could help in overcoming language obstacles, such as improving access to pre-school education for Roma children and the employment of suitably trained Roma teaching assistants, have not been implemented in a systematic and comprehensive way. Roma culture and history in general are not included in a systematic way in school curricula.¹⁰³

Taking into account the unsatisfactory situation of Roma in the field of education (as well as in other fields), the Government of the Republic of Slovenia prepared, and the Parliament adopted, a National Programme of Measures for Roma 2010-15,¹⁰⁴ which was subsequently replaced by a National Programme for 2017-21¹⁰⁵ Currently, the National

⁹⁷ See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/slovenia>.

⁹⁸ Amnesty International Slovenia, 'Podatki o šolskem uspehu romskih otrok kažejo, da se jih pušča na cedilu', 4 October 2018, available at: <https://www.amnesty.si/podatki-o-solskem-uspehu-romskih-otrok-kazejo-da-se-jih-pusca-na-cedilu.html>. No updated figures are available.

⁹⁹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013), *Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Slovenia, adopted by the Committee at its sixty-third session* (27 May–14 June 2013), Section B. 24(c), <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqhKb7yhsiN07UlbUkV3oM5iuiI94uROt6rFYcmjQDrxXuoIjUb6XmpGj%2bry4vaS%2beIQg4LtHqUn%2fAeN9mzSjCXr%2bqagY%2f2eVH9v1z9X%2fsdydZItFNIA>.

¹⁰⁰ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2014), *Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Slovenia*, 15 December 2014, available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fSVN%2fC.O%2f2&Lang=en.

¹⁰¹ Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights (2017), *Report on Slovenia*, CommDH(2017)21, pp. 19-20, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-the-visit-to-slovenia-from-20-to-23-march-2017-by-nils-muizn/1680730405>.

¹⁰² Amnesty International Slovenia, available at www.amnesty.si/romi. There is no update available; in the author's assessment, the situation remains identical.

¹⁰³ Amnesty International (2006), *False starts: The exclusion of Romani children from primary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia*, available at: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR05/002/2006/en/.

¹⁰⁴ Government of the Republic of Slovenia (2010), National Programme of Measures for Roma, 2010-2015, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=URED5100>.

¹⁰⁵ Government of the Republic of Slovenia (2017), National Programme of Measures for Roma, 2017-2021, available at: www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/NPUR_2017_2021.pdf.

Programme for 2021-2030 is in place.¹⁰⁶ The 2021-30 programme pursues the strategic objective of strengthening the pre-school education of Roma children and successful completion of primary education through (*inter alia*) the employment of Roma assistants in kindergartens; strengthening the profession of Roma assistant; a tutoring system for Roma pupils; Roma and Slovenian language learning; the preparation of quality materials for assisting Roma children in the education process; education for education professionals who work with Roma children; a reduction in school absenteeism among Roma children; and the adaptation of high school programmes for Roma children. Based on the national programme, the Government reports to the National Assembly once a year on progress achieved in areas covered by the programme. The pandemic and the school closure created numerous issues for pupils belonging to specific groups, such as Roma. The Advocate of the Principle of Equality carried out an assessment of discrimination in relation to the decrees, based on which schools were closed. It found that the closure of schools had negative consequences for vulnerable groups of children in particular, including Roma.¹⁰⁷ In November 2022, the Advocate conducted a focus group with representatives from kindergartens, schools, counsellors, national bodies and research institutions who are professionally involved in education, support or research in the field of Roma inclusion in education.¹⁰⁸ The participants stated the main obstacles as: fear and mistrust of educational institutions - parents' experiences with schools are often poor, peer acceptance of Roma in schools is worse and so resistance to education is higher; the rise in intolerance towards Roma and informal pressure from parents to segregate Roma and non-Roma children; school absenteeism among Roma children, which may also be linked to lower expectations of them by teachers - although they could achieve more, and often do, teachers often settle for their minimum knowledge, thus indirectly (unintentionally) reducing their motivation; and inadequate living conditions, which make it significantly more difficult to prepare Roma children for schooling and school work at home.

3.2.8 Access to and supply of goods and services that are available to the public (Article 3(1)(h) Directive 2000/43)

In Slovenia, national legislation prohibits discrimination in access to and the supply of goods and services as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive.

In accordance with Article 2(1), indent 8, of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, equal treatment is guaranteed, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic, in access to and supply of goods and services which are available to the public. While gender identity and gender expression are explicitly listed as protected grounds, sex characteristics are not. However, as the Protection Against Discrimination Act contains an open-ended list of protected grounds, sex characteristics should also be covered by its provisions. With regard to access to goods and services, Article 25 of the Consumer Protection Act should also be considered, as it states that providers must sell goods and provide services to all consumers under the same conditions.

The 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which prohibits discrimination on the ground of disability, sets out a reasonable accommodation duty on the ground of disability that is imposed on providers of goods and services (but not on manufacturers or designers of goods).

¹⁰⁶ Government of the Republic of Slovenia (2021), National Programme of Measures for Roma, 2021-2030, available at: <https://www.gov.si/novice/2021-12-28-vlada-je-sprejela-nacionalni-program-ukrepov-za-rome-za-obdobje-20212030/>.

¹⁰⁷ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, assessment of discrimination, No. 050-15/2021/56, 19 October 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022)*, p. 155, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

In 2022, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality found direct discrimination in a case of three Roma persons who were denied service in a bar. The Advocate found that it was a case of general relevance for the protection against discrimination, since no personal circumstances of an individual or group could justify the denial of access to certain goods or services.¹⁰⁹ For more information, see case law in section 12.2 below.

a) Distinction between goods and services available publicly or privately

In Slovenia, national law distinguishes between goods and services available to the public (e.g. in shops, restaurants and banks) and those only available privately (e.g. those restricted to members of a private association).

Non-discrimination provisions apply only to goods and services available to the public, as stipulated by Article 2(1), indent 8, of the Protection Against Discrimination Act.

3.2.9 Housing (Article 3(1)(h) Directive 2000/43)

In Slovenia, national legislation prohibits discrimination in the area of housing, as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive.

In accordance with the Protection Against Discrimination Act, equal treatment is guaranteed irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic, in relation to apartments and their supply (the law mentions only apartments and not housing in general) (Article 2(1), indent 8). While gender identity and gender expression are explicitly listed as protected grounds, sex characteristics are not. However, as the Protection Against Discrimination Act contains an open-ended list of protected grounds, sex characteristics should also be covered by its provisions. The 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which prohibits discrimination on the ground of disability, sets out an obligation for local governments to provide accessible apartments to persons with disabilities who meet the conditions for obtaining non-profit (social) apartments (Article 13). The Act does not set out an obligation on all (private) providers of housing (rented/leased and sold) to provide housing that is accessible to persons with disabilities, and it does not define the reasonable accommodation duty on landlords to allow a person with disabilities to make changes to the property.

a) Trends and patterns regarding housing segregation for Roma

In Slovenia, there are trends and patterns of housing segregation and discrimination against the Roma. Although these issues do not necessarily fall within the scope of the directive, they are particularly significant because they represent discriminatory attitudes on the part of the general public towards the exclusion of the Roma population.

Various dated but still relevant reports and state documents contain references to continuous problems deriving from irregular Roma settlements without appropriate infrastructure and to the poor housing conditions of the Roma.¹¹⁰ Roma settlements that have been constructed without a building permit on land owned by another legal or private person are often endangered due to the fact that this land is intended for the construction of apartments, business and industrial centres. In such cases, the interests of Roma families living in these settlements are often not sufficiently taken into account.

¹⁰⁹ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, decision No. 0700-8/2022/48, 19 December 2022.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Human Rights Ombudsman (2012), *Letno poročilo Varuha človekovih pravic Republike Slovenije za leto 2011 (Annual report for 2011)*, available at: www.varuh-rs.si/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/lp/Letno_porocilo_Varuha_za_leto_2011.pdf.

Consequently, the Ombudsman continues to stress that more concrete measures must be adopted to regularise Roma settlements.^{111 112}

In 2017, the Government formed a new Intergovernmental Working Group for Regulating the Spatial Problems of Roma Settlements, with a one-year mandate. The final report of the Working Group was prepared in 2018, but it was only made public in January 2020. The report proposes seven measures that would lead to the regularisation and improvement of living conditions in Roma settlements.¹¹³ On 23 July 2020, the Government of Slovenia established a new Working Group for dealing with Roma Problems,¹¹⁴ which has a mandate to deal with Roma housing and Roma settlements, among other issues. In 2021, the Government adopted the *Eighth Government Report on the situation of the Roma community in Slovenia*, which shows that no significant progress has been achieved in the field of housing.¹¹⁵ The report does not include any recommendations for addressing these problems. No improvement could be identified in the *Ninth Government Report on the situation of the Roma community in Slovenia*.¹¹⁶ The Ministry of the Economy and Tourism announced that while it will, within the limits of its competences and budgetary possibilities, continue its efforts to assist municipalities in co-financing the construction of basic infrastructure for Roma, it will only support projects under regional development programmes that address the problems of Roma communities in a broader or more comprehensive way, and not only in a narrow area such as the provision of basic communal infrastructure in Roma settlements. Namely, the Ministry assessed that it is no longer viable to continue to allocate funds for the construction of basic communal infrastructure through public tenders.

The problems of living conditions in Roma settlements and their isolation from the rest of society, as well the issue of access to facilities and a safe water supply, were also highlighted in the 2014 and 2019 ECRI reports.¹¹⁷

Further, according to the 2017 report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the housing situation of Roma communities in Slovenia, which is generally unfavourable, varies from one region to another. Only a small number of Roma live in houses or apartments together with the majority population. Discriminatory reactions often prevent Roma families from buying or renting accommodation. The Roma also experience difficulties in accessing social housing, which is generally in short supply in the country, due to conditions set by municipalities that they cannot meet. Most Roma continue to live in settlements isolated from the rest of society in conditions that are well below the minimum standard of living, particularly in south-east Slovenia (Dolenjska region). There, the Roma frequently live in makeshift wooden huts or trailers, which are usually set up

¹¹¹ Human Rights Ombudsman (2019), *Letno poročilo Varuha človekovih pravic Republike Slovenije za leto 2018 (Annual report for 2018)*, available at: http://www.varuh-rs.si/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/lp/VARUH_LP2018.pdf.

¹¹² Human Rights Ombudsman (2022), *Letno poročilo Varuha človekovih pravic Republike Slovenije za leto 2021 (Annual report for 2021)*, available at: https://www.varuh-rs.si/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/lp/LP_2021/Letno_porocilo_VCP_RS_za_leto_2021.pdf.

¹¹³ Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (2020), *Final Report of the Intergovernmental Working Group for Regulating the Spatial Problems of Roma Settlements (Zaključno poročilo o delovanju medresorske delovne skupine za reševanje prostorske problematike Romov)*, document No. 012-15/2017/366 of 17 January 2020.

¹¹⁴ Members are listed on the website of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia: <https://www.gov.si/zbirke/delovna-telesa/delovna-skupina-za-obravnavo-romske-problematike/>.

¹¹⁵ Government of Slovenia (2021), *Osmo poročilo Vlade Republike Slovenije o položaju romske skupnosti v Sloveniji (Eighth Government report on the situation of the Roma community in Slovenia)*, available at: <https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/UN/Dokumenti-Romi/Osmo-porocilo/Osmo-porocilo-o-položaju-romske-skupnosti-v-Sloveniji.docx>.

¹¹⁶ Government of Slovenia (2021), *Deveto poročilo Vlade Republike Slovenije o položaju romske skupnosti v Sloveniji (Ninth Government report on the situation of the Roma community in Slovenia)*, available at: <https://www.gov.si teme/romska-skupnost/>.

¹¹⁷ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) (2014) *ECRI report on Slovenia*, available at: www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/slovenia/SVN-CbC-IV-2014-038-ENG.pdf; European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) (2019) *ECRI report on Slovenia*, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/government-comments-on-the-fifth-report-on-slovenia/168094cb03>.

illegally on state-owned or private land designated for agricultural or industrial use, such as the settlements in Grosuplje and Ribnica municipalities. Public utility facilities are inadequate or non-existent.¹¹⁸

In December 2021, a new Construction Act was adopted to bring the legislation in line with the Constitution regarding availability of an effective legal remedy against the decision to tear down the illegally built building.¹¹⁹ In 2017, the Constitutional Court decided on the issue of Roma houses built without building permits and the orders of the spatial inspectors to demolish such houses.¹²⁰ The Constitutional Court had found that Articles 152 and 156a of the Construction Act are in conflict with the Constitution, as they do not provide for an effective legal remedy against the decision to tear down the illegally built building. The Court did not discuss discrimination in the reasoning, but it based its decision on the fact that the case concerns the Roma minority as a group that is particularly vulnerable. This was a strategic litigation case in which a Roma applicant was assisted by Amnesty International

It is worth mentioning that protection of individuals in cases of forced evictions is not in line with ECHR standards (e.g. *Winterstein v. France*),¹²¹ which require the provision of alternative accommodation in the event of forced evictions.

The ECtHR did not find any violation of the Convention in two cases against Slovenia that related to access to drinking water and sanitation in irregular Roma settlements (*Hudorovič, Hudorovič and Novak v. Slovenia*).^{122 123} The applications claiming violations of Articles 3 and 8 of the ECHR, as well as Article 14 in conjunction with Articles 3 and 8 of the Convention, were submitted to the court in March 2014. These were strategic litigation cases in which the applicants were assisted by Amnesty International and pro bono lawyers.

The Housing Act, which was adopted on 19 June 2003, and the Spatial Planning Act, which was adopted on 30 March 2007, apply generally and contain no provisions specifically concerning Roma. Some specific provisions on housing are contained in the Roma Community Act, which in Article 5(2) recognises the importance of regularising spatial problems concerning Roma settlements. However, the provision seems to be purely declaratory and has not yet been invoked in litigation. In 2018, draft amendments to the Roma Community Act were prepared to remedy the deficiencies of this and other provisions in the law; however, the law was not passed.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights (2017), *Report on Slovenia*, CommDH(2017)21, 11 July 2017, pp. 15-16, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-the-visit-to-slovenia-from-20-to-23-march-2017-by-nils-muizn/1680730405>. Council of Europe, Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (2018), *Fourth Opinion on Slovenia*, ACFC/OP/IV(2017)003, p. 15, available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/news-2018/-/asset_publisher/WSzOdQnzJ7kM/content/slovenia-publication-of-the-4th-advisory-committee-opinion?_101_INSTANCE_WSzOdQnzJ7kM_viewMode=view/.

¹¹⁹ Construction Act (*Gradbeni zakon*), 9 December 2021, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO8244>.

¹²⁰ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, decision No. U-I-64/14-20, 12 October 2017.

¹²¹ *Winterstein and Others v. France*, No. 27013/07, 17 October 2013.

¹²² Application Nos. 24816/14 and 25140/14.

¹²³ See *Hudorovič and Hudorovič v. Slovenia* and *Novak and others v. Slovenia*, Nos. 24816/14 and 25140/14, 10 March 2020.

¹²⁴ Government of Slovenia (2018), *Peto poročilo Vlade Republike Slovenije o položaju romske skupnosti v Sloveniji* (Fifth Government report on the situation of the Roma community in Slovenia), available at: http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto_porocilo_Romi.pdf, p. 16.

4 EXCEPTIONS

4.1 Genuine and determining occupational requirements (Article 4 Directive 2000/43, Article 4(1) Directive 2000/78)

In Slovenia, national legislation provides for an exception for genuine and determining occupational requirements.

Article 13(2) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act states that difference in treatment in the area of employment on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic does not constitute discrimination in cases in which, by reason of the nature of the particular occupational activities concerned or of the context in which they are carried out, such a characteristic constitutes a genuine and determining occupational requirement, provided that the objective is legitimate and the requirement is appropriate, necessary and proportionate.

The exception for genuine and determining occupational requirements is also referred to in the Employment Relationship Act. Article 6(5) states that different treatment based on a personal characteristic does not constitute discrimination if, due to the nature of the work or the circumstances in which the work is performed, a particular ground represents a genuine and determining occupational requirement for work, if this requirement is proportionate and justified with a legitimate goal.

There is no case law yet on genuine and determining occupational requirements.

4.2 Employers with an ethos based on religion or belief (Article 4(2) Directive 2000/78)

In Slovenia, national law provides for an exception for employers with an ethos based on religion or belief.

Article 13(4) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act states that difference in treatment in the area of employment on the grounds of the religion or belief of the individual, in the case of occupational activities within churches and other public or private organisations, the ethos of which is based on religion or belief, shall not constitute discrimination where, by reason of the nature of these activities or of the context in which they are carried out, a person's religion or belief constitutes a legitimate and justified occupational requirement, having regard to the organisation's ethos. The same provision is included in Article 3(3) of the Religious Freedom Act. While these provisions stipulate that the occupational requirement is legitimate and justified, they do not mention that the requirement must be genuine.

Specific mention of only the ground of religion or belief implies that discrimination on other grounds is not allowed. However, this is not specifically clarified in law and there is as yet no case law on this matter.

The cited provisions reflect only the first sub-section of Article 4(2) of the Directive 2000/78 and not the second sub-section concerning the right of churches and other public or private organisations, the ethos of which is based on religion or belief, acting in conformity with national constitutions and laws, to require individuals working for them to act in good faith and with loyalty to the organisation's ethos.

4.3 Armed forces and other specific occupations (Article 3(4) and Recitals 18 and 19 Directive 2000/78/EC)

In Slovenia, there is no exception for the armed forces in relation to age discrimination (Article 3(4), Directive 2000/78/EC).

However, the Defence Act¹²⁵ states that candidates who wish to perform military service professionally should, among other requirements, in principle not be older than 25 (or 30 for officers).¹²⁶ Article 88(3) states that anyone who wants to professionally engage in military service must fulfil specific requirements, which include a condition of physical and mental capability (disability is not explicitly referred to). The age requirement is absolute and does not depend on the ability of the individual to perform required tasks.

Article 52 of the Police Organisation and Work Act¹²⁷ lists circumstances in which the employment of an individual in the police force is not allowed. These circumstances include illness or psychological issues which could endanger safe police work. Article 44 of this Act also requires that a police officer has adequate mental and physical capabilities, which is a provision that allows for a difference in treatment of persons with disabilities.

4.4 Nationality discrimination (Article 3(2))

a) Discrimination on the ground of nationality

In Slovenia, national law includes exceptions relating to difference in treatment based on nationality.

There are many provisions in the employment legislation that exclude people of other nationalities. Article 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia states that foreigners (i.e. non-nationals) enjoy all rights enshrined in international law, while under the national law some rights can be reserved for Slovenian nationals only. Article 88(2) of the Defence Act, for example, states that an individual who wishes to join the armed forces as a professional soldier must be a citizen of Slovenia. People with dual citizenship are not allowed to engage professionally in defence activities. Since nationality of other EU Member States is not specifically mentioned in the Act, this means that nationals of other EU Member States are not allowed to work as professional soldiers in the Slovenian army.

In Slovenia, nationality (as in citizenship) is not explicitly mentioned as a protected ground in national anti-discrimination law.

The Constitution, the Protection Against Discrimination Act and the Employment Relationship Act do not list nationality (they list a ground of *nacionalnost*, but in Slovenian this means 'ethnicity') as one of the grounds of prohibited discrimination. However, the Constitution and the two laws all prohibit unequal treatment on the grounds of 'any other personal characteristic'; therefore, nationality could be included as a ground on which discrimination is prohibited.

¹²⁵ Defence Act (*Zakon o obrambi*), 20 December 1994, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO532.

¹²⁶ The Ministry of Defence states in its recruitment adverts that applicants must be a maximum of 25 years old and that the contract will be ended when the individual is 45 years old.

¹²⁷ Police Organisation and Work Act (*Zakon o organiziranosti in delu v policiji*), 7 February 2013, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO6315.

b) Relationship between nationality and 'racial or ethnic origin'

The relationship between nationality and race or ethnic origin is not specified either in legislation or in case law. Since most laws, as well as the Constitution, contain an open-ended list of grounds, both nationality and race or ethnic origin can be used to claim both direct and indirect discrimination.

In addition, there are various conditions for entry and residence of third-country nationals in Slovenia, as well as for access to certain social benefits and posts depending on nationality. These conditions might cause indirect discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnicity, but there is no research confirming this.

4.5 Health and safety at work (Article 7(2) Directive 2000/78)

In Slovenia, there are no exceptions in relation to disability and health and safety as specified in Article 7(2) of the Employment Equality Directive.

There are no explicit exceptions in relation to disability and health and safety in law. The only provision that could be relevant can be found in the Health and Safety at Work Act, which stipulates that, when concluding an employment contract, the employee must fulfil the medical requirements for that specific position, which is determined by medical examination and a medical certificate. If the employee is medically fit for a certain post, the employer cannot say that employing them would endanger other employees or customers.

In the Act, there is no exception regarding health and safety issues resulting from ethnic origin or religion, thus turbans, particular hairstyles, beards, jewellery, etc. are not permitted if they run counter to health and safety rules. Related to this provision, the Higher Labour and Social Court found no indirect discrimination in a case of a woman wearing a headscarf who had applied in response to a job advert for a service worker in a hospital but was not selected for the job, because hygiene requirements represent a legitimate goal.¹²⁸

4.6 Exceptions related to discrimination on the ground of age (Article 6 Directive 2000/78)

4.6.1 Direct discrimination

a) Exceptions to the prohibition of direct discrimination on grounds of age

In Slovenia, national law provides for specific exception(s) for direct discrimination on the ground of age.

The Defence Act¹²⁹ states that candidates wishing to perform military service professionally should, among other requirements, in principle not be older than 25 (or 30 for officers).¹³⁰

For certain other professions such as judges, the minimum age requirement is set at 30 years¹³¹ of age (Judicial Service Act).¹³² This might be inconsistent with CJEU case law

¹²⁸ Higher Labour and Social Court, judgment No. Pdp 898/2017, 8 March 2018.

¹²⁹ Defence Act (*Zakon o obrambi*), 20 December 1994, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO532.

¹³⁰ The Ministry of Defence states in its recruitment adverts that applicants must be a maximum of 25 years old and that the contract will be ended when the individual is 45 years old.

¹³¹ The law does not mention any justification for setting the minimum age for judges at 30.

¹³² Judicial Service Act (*Zakon o sodniški službi*), 30 March 1994, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO334.

in which the Court elaborated on whether such conditions are in line with the genuine occupational requirement argument.¹³³

b) Justification of direct discrimination on the ground of age

In Slovenia, national law provides for justifications of direct discrimination on the ground of age.

Article 13(3) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act states that difference of treatment in relation to employment on the ground of age does not constitute discrimination, if such treatment is objectively and reasonably justified with a legitimate aim, including the legitimate aims of the active employment policy, labour market and vocational training, and if the means to achieve these objectives are appropriate, necessary and proportionate. The test is compliant with the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union. There is as yet no case law in Slovenia on this matter. See also section 4.6.4.

c) Permitted differences of treatment based on age

In Slovenia, national law permits differences of treatment based on age for any activities within the material scope of Directive 2000/78/EC.

Article 60 of the 2010 Labour Market Regulation Act¹³⁴ contains provisions which allow direct discrimination on the ground of age if it is objectively and reasonably justified by a legitimate aim. It provides unemployed workers over the age of 50 with the right to receive unemployment benefits for 19 months instead of just 12 months, as is the case for other workers in the same situation (that is, with insurance of 25 years or more), and unemployed workers over the age of 55 with the right to receive compensation for 25 months.

On 25 November 2020, the National Assembly adopted a law allowing employers to unilaterally, without justification, terminate the employment of workers who met the conditions for the old-age pension (conditions are 65 years of age if the person worked for 15 years, and 60 years of age if the person worked for 40 years). This option was included in Articles 21 and 22 of the Act Determining the Intervention Measures to Mitigate the Consequences of the Second Wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The goals of these provisions, according to the legislature, were:

- balancing the legal position of the employer with the position of workers through a simpler procedure for terminating a regular employment contract in order to reduce the administrative burden on the employer and increase their international competitiveness;
- reducing the number of civil servants in the public sector and thus reducing the wage bill and establishing a balanced age structure;
- easier planning of retirement and ensuring promotion, especially of young officials, and youth employment.

The provisions were submitted for constitutional review before the Constitutional Court. In a landmark decision of 18 November 2021, the Constitutional Court found unanimously that the provisions were unconstitutional and annulled them. The Court focused its reasoning on the inconsistency of the challenged provisions with International Labour Organization Convention No. 158 (Termination of Employment Convention) and with Article 24 of the European Social Charter (Revised). The Court based its decision on Article

¹³³ See judgment of 13 November 2014, *Mario Vital Pérez v. Ayuntamiento de Oviedo*, C-416/13, EU:C:2014:2371; and judgment of 12 January 2010, *Colin Wolf v. Stadt Frankfurt am Main*, C-229/08, EU:C:2010:3.

¹³⁴ Labour Market Regulation Act (*Zakon o urejanju trga dela*), 28 September 2010, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5840.

8 of the Constitution, which states that laws and regulations must comply with generally accepted principles of international law and with treaties that are binding on Slovenia and that ratified and published treaties shall be applied directly. The international law provisions concerned demand that there must be a valid reason for dismissal relating to the ability or conduct of the worker or to the operational needs of the specific employer justifying the dismissal. As the Court had already found a violation based on these grounds, it did not elaborate on the other reasons for unconstitutionality expressed by the claimants, including claims that the provisions were discriminatory on the grounds of age. However, in a concurring opinion, two judges out of nine stated that the Court's decision should have taken into consideration the issue of compliance with EU law and protection from age discrimination in employment in line with Directive 2000/78/EC and Article 15 of the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights.

d) Fixing of ages for admission to occupational pension schemes

In Slovenia, national law allows occupational pension schemes to fix ages for admission to the scheme, taking advantage of the possibility for which Article 6(2) provides.

The Pension and Disability Insurance Act introduced two types of supplementary pension insurance in 2000: compulsory (for insured persons performing particularly hard work and work harmful to health, and insured persons performing professional activities which cannot be successfully performed after attaining a certain age) and voluntary.

The voluntary supplementary scheme is an option offered in particular to younger generations of the employed population, who will have to use their own savings to provide for their social security in their old age due to a gradual decrease in the pensions earned in the mandatory insurance scheme. Mandatory insurance is financed on a pay-as-you-go basis, while supplementary pension and disability insurance is based on funded schemes. The law states that an individual must be included in the mandatory insurance scheme in order to be admitted to the voluntary scheme. Although the law does not explicitly fix ages for admission, it is implied that the minimum age for entry is 15 (because children below the age of 15 are not allowed to work and must be in full-time education), since the law states that everyone who is employed and self-employed must be included in the mandatory insurance. Accordingly, people can join on a voluntary basis at the age of 15.

The calculation of pensions received from occupational pension schemes does not depend on the age of the beneficiary, but is linked to the number of years for which contributions to such schemes were paid and to the amount of funds paid into these schemes for each beneficiary.¹³⁵

4.6.2 Special conditions for younger or older workers

In Slovenia, there are special conditions set by law for older and younger workers in order to promote their vocational integration.

Integration measures form part of 'active employment' policies providing for sheltered employment; incentives for the employment of people in certain age categories; and specific opportunities for both younger and older workers.¹³⁶

4.6.3 Minimum and maximum age requirements

In Slovenia, there are exceptions permitting minimum and maximum age requirements in relation to access to employment and training.

¹³⁵ See, for example, Pension and Disability Insurance Act, Article 204(5).

¹³⁶ See: <https://www.gov.si teme/aktivna-politika-zaposlovanja/>.

As a general rule, the law sets the minimum age for entering into an employment contract at 15 and for working on a ship at 16. For certain professions such as judge, the minimum age requirement is set at 30 years¹³⁷ of age (Judicial Service Act). This might be inconsistent with CJEU case law in which the Court elaborated on whether such conditions are in line with the genuine occupational requirement argument.¹³⁸ There are no maximum age requirements for employment set as a general rule. However, for certain professions there are maximum age conditions prescribed for entering employment as well as for obligatory termination of employment on reaching a certain age. An example is the maximum age for judges, which is set at 70 (Article 74 of the Judicial Service Act). These exceptions also apply to employees in the armed forces (see Section 4.3). The Defence Act states that candidates wishing to enter military service professionally should, among other requirements, in principle not be older than 25 years, or 30 years for officers.

The Ministry of Defence states as a condition in its recruitment adverts that candidates must be a maximum of 25 years old and that the contract will be ended when the individual is 45 years old, but the employer must then reallocate the employee to a different position or help them to qualify for another position (Article 93 of the Defence Act).

There is no obvious evidence of age discrimination in training opportunities. However, the 1998 Act Amending the Employment and Unemployment Insurance Act has imposed, *inter alia*, a rule by which both younger and older age is one of the criteria for the inclusion of an unemployed individual in the active employment policy programme (i.e. state subsidised employment).

There are no maximum age requirements for employees in the police.

4.6.4 Retirement

a) State pension age

In Slovenia, there is no state pension age at which individuals must begin to collect their state pension. The age at which the pension becomes available depends on the number of years the person has worked (65 years of age if the person worked for 15 years; 60 years of age if the person worked for 40 years).

If an individual wishes to work beyond the pension age, the pension can be deferred. Between 2012 and 2017, the rules provided that in the public sector, the individual had to retire when reaching pensionable age, and could not defer his or her pension unless he or she changed jobs and became an employee in the private sector.¹³⁹

Individuals cannot collect a pension and still work on the basis of an employment contract (but may work on the basis of civil law contracts – consultancy agreements, author's

¹³⁷ The law does not mention any justification for setting the minimum age for judges at 30.

¹³⁸ See judgment of 13 November 2014, *Mario Vital Pérez v. Ayuntamiento de Oviedo*, C-416/13, EU:C:2014:2371; and judgment of 12 January 2010, *Colin Wolf v. Stadt Frankfurt am Main*, C-229/08, EU:C:2010:3.

¹³⁹ The laws that provided for this were:

- Fiscal Balance Act (*Zakon za uravnoteženje javnih financ*), 11 May 2012, <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO6388>;
- Act Regulating Measures Relating to Salaries and Other Labour Costs for 2016 and other Measures in the Public Sector (*Zakon o ukrepih na področju plač in drugih stroškov dela za leto 2016 in drugih ukrepih v javnem sektorju*), 18 November 2015 (ZUJF16), <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7303>;
- Act Regulating Measures Relating to Salaries and Other Labour Costs for 2017 and other Measures in the Public Sector (*Zakon o ukrepih na področju plač in drugih stroškov dela za leto 2017 in drugih ukrepih v javnem sektorju*), 22 December 2016 (ZUJF17), <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7614>.

agreement etc.). If they decide to continue to work as a self-employed person,¹⁴⁰ they may collect only a part of their pension.

There are two different types of pensions available under conditions defined by law: old-age pension and disability pension.¹⁴¹ In 2012, a new Pension and Disability Insurance Act was adopted, significantly changing the rules on retirement. In 2020, the Act was amended.¹⁴² For entitlement to the old-age (state) pension (dependent only on years at work), men and women have to be at least 65 years old and have 15 years of pension insurance in order to receive a full pension (the pension insurance period is the same as years of service, unless additional years of pension insurance have been paid for by the insured person).¹⁴³

The right to a pension is also accorded to an individual (whether male or female) who has reached the age of 60 and has 40 years of pension insurance (Article 27(4) of the Pension and Disability Insurance Act).

The state encourages longer employment with bonuses; in line with the 2019 amendments¹⁴⁴ to the legislation, employees who continue working after 40 years of employment may start collecting up to a maximum of 40 % of their pension compared with what they would have received if they had retired (Articles 39.a and 40.a), and they may continue to receive this amount for a maximum of three years. If a person claiming the old-age pension has neither reached full pensionable age nor accumulated 40 years of service, their old-age pension is permanently reduced by a certain percentage. People can also choose to defer their pensions. Article 116 of the Pension and Disability Insurance Act gives an individual who continues working after reaching pensionable age the right to be elected to statutory office or to be in employment or engage in an economic activity. In this case, their pension entitlement is deferred, because they are not entitled to receive double payments. If an individual who has already obtained the right to a pension works only part-time, they have the right to receive their pension in the proportionate amount. This regulation does not interfere with the right to a higher pension in the case of working longer than required by law.

b) Occupational pension schemes

In Slovenia, 65 is normally the age at which people can begin to receive payments from occupational pension schemes and other employer-funded pension arrangements.

If an individual wish to work for longer, payments from such occupational pension schemes can be deferred.

Under the 2019 amendments to the Pension and Disability Insurance Act, an individual can collect part of their pension and still work on the basis of an employment contract.

¹⁴⁰ People are self-employed in Slovenia if they set up an individual entrepreneurship. In this way, they are bound not by the employment legislation but by civil law. They issue invoices to be paid for their services. However, as individual entrepreneurs they can also employ others, and these relationships are governed by employment legislation.

¹⁴¹ Until the end of 2010, there were also state pensions available for people who had reached the age of 65 and who had permanent residence in Slovenia, if they had no other pension in Slovenia or abroad, and if they had registered permanent residence in Slovenia for at least 30 years between the ages of 15 and 65. However, since 1 January 2011, this pension no longer exists.

¹⁴² Act Amending Pension and Disability Insurance Act (*Zakona o spremembah in dopolnitvah Zakona o pokojninskem in invalidskem zavarovanju*), 24 September 2020, available at: <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO8102>.

¹⁴³ Pension and Disability Insurance Act (*Zakon o pokojninskem in invalidskem zavarovanju*), 4 December 2012, Article 27, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO6280.

¹⁴⁴ Act Amending the Pension and Disability Insurance Act (*Zakona o spremembah in dopolnitvah Zakona o pokojninskem in invalidskem zavarovanju*), 7 December 2019, available at: <https://www.uradni-list.si/glasilo-uradni-list-rs/vsebina/2019-01-3306?sup=2019-01-3306>.

Occupational pension schemes are organised as voluntary pension insurance, which represents an additional insurance for companies which choose to pay contributions for their employees. Insured people are entitled to an occupational pension under the same conditions as the old-age (state) pension, which is taken at 65 under the general rules.

c) State-imposed mandatory retirement ages

In Slovenia, there is no state-imposed mandatory retirement age. A mandatory retirement age was, however, imposed in the public sector between 2012 and 2017.

The age of voluntary retirement depends on the number of years for which the person has worked (65 years of age if the person worked for 15 years; 60 years of age if the person worked for 40 years).

The Pension and Disability Insurance Act fixes minimum age and minimum working years for entitlement to a pension, but it is not mandatory for an employee to retire when he or she fulfils the conditions for retirement.

There is only one situation when compulsory retirement is permitted, which is in the case of complete disability (i.e. Category I disability under the Pension and Disability Insurance Act). In this case, the employment relationship ceases when the employee receives the decision confirming their complete disability (see Article 119 of the Employment Relationship Act).

Between 2012 and 2017, there were provisions in place stating that an employment agreement with an individual working for the state administration (i.e. all employees in the public sector) would be terminated when the person reached pensionable age. With some exceptions, the person had a choice of either retiring from all employment or finding employment in the private sector (e.g. Article 188 of the Fiscal Balance Act).¹⁴⁵ The Fiscal Balance Act was adopted in the middle of the financial crisis with the aim of ensuring sustainable public finances and reducing budgetary expenditure (austerity measures). The Act stipulated that the cited provision on the termination of employment shall apply up to and including the year following the year in which economic growth exceeds 2.5 per cent of gross domestic product. Once this condition was fulfilled, the provision was no longer applicable.

d) Retirement ages imposed by employers

In Slovenia, national law does not permit employers to set retirement ages (or ages at which the termination of an employment contract is possible) by contract or collective bargaining or unilaterally. This may, however, happen in practice: that the person, instead of being laid off, retires early but does not qualify for full pension.

e) Employment rights applicable to all workers irrespective of age

The law on protection against dismissal and other laws protecting employment rights applies to all workers irrespective of age, even if they remain in employment after attaining pensionable age or any other age. However, in December 2020, a legislative measure was adopted allowing employers to unilaterally terminate the employment of a person who meets the conditions for the retirement pension.¹⁴⁶ However, on 18 November 2021, the

¹⁴⁵ Fiscal Balance Act (*Zakon za uravnoteženje javnih financ*), 11 May 2012, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO6388.

¹⁴⁶ Act Determining Intervention Measures to Assist in Mitigating the Consequences of the Second Wave of the COVID-19 Epidemic (*Zakon o interventnih ukrepih za pomoč pri omilitvi posledic drugega vala epidemije covid-19*), 30 December 2020, Articles 21 and 22, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO8304>.

Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia found that these provisions were unconstitutional.¹⁴⁷

Therefore, the retirement age is not fixed, which means that a person can continue working if he or she so wishes and if the capacity of the employer allows. People who are on service as opposed to employment contracts are not protected by legislation on dismissal.

f) Compliance of national law with CJEU case law

In Slovenia, national legislation is in line with CJEU case law on age regarding mandatory retirement.

For example, the Defence Act states that candidates wishing to perform military service professionally should, among other requirements, in principle not be older than 25 years, or 30 years for officers. The case is similar to the *Wolf* case in which discrimination was not found to have occurred.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, for certain professions, such as judge, the minimum age requirement is set at 30 years of age (Judicial Service Act). However, for a definite assessment of whether the legislation is in accordance with CJEU case law, judicial interpretation is required.

4.6.5 Redundancy

a) Age and seniority taken into account for redundancy selection

In Slovenia, national law does not permit age to be taken into account in selecting workers for redundancy, although it does permit seniority (length of time in work and experience) to be taken into account in the case of large-scale lay-offs.

Article 102 of the Employment Relationship Act sets criteria for selecting workers for redundancy in the case of large-scale layoffs. The primary criteria are the professional education of the employee and his or her work qualifications, as well as additional knowledge and skills required. Other criteria are length of work experience (seniority), performance at work, years of active employment, state of health and social circumstances. These criteria can make redundancy more or less likely, depending on the criteria. For example, if an individual is better educated, performs better at work, has more working experience and additional knowledge and a difficult social situation, redundancy is less likely. The criteria of work experience and years at work obviously indirectly discriminate on the ground of age. It is, however, an example of positive discrimination, since older workers are less likely to get a new job.

b) Age taken into account for redundancy compensation

In Slovenia, national law provides compensation for redundancy. Compensation for redundancy, in cases covered by law, is not affected by the age of the worker (since it depends on the years working for the employer and the salary).

¹⁴⁷ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, judgment No. U-I16/21, U-I-27/21, 18 November 2021.

¹⁴⁸ Judgment of 12 January 2010, *Colin Wolf v. Stadt Frankfurt am Main*, C-229/08, EU:C:2010:3.

4.7 Further exceptions necessary in a democratic society: Public security, public order, criminal offences, protection of health, protection of the rights and freedoms of others (Article 2(5) Directive 2000/78)

In Slovenia, national law does not include exceptions that seek to rely on Article 2(5) of the Employment Equality Directive (public security, public order, criminal offences, protection of health, protection of the rights and freedoms of others).

4.8 Any other exceptions

In Slovenia, there are no other exceptions to the prohibition of discrimination (on any ground covered by this report) provided for in national law.

5 POSITIVE ACTION (Article 5 Directive 2000/43, Article 7 Directive 2000/78)

a) Scope for positive action measures

In Slovenia, positive action is permitted in national law in respect of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation. The law does not state grounds for which positive action is not permitted.

Article 17 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act states that positive action consists of temporary measures, defined by law, which are designed to prevent a less favourable position for people with a particular personal characteristic or to compensate for a less favourable position (Article 17(1)). Furthermore, the law stipulates two different forms of positive action: i) incentive measures which provide special incentives or benefits for people in a less favourable situation, and ii) positive measures which intend to give priority to people with a particular personal characteristic and are used in cases when there is an obvious underrepresentation of people with a specific personal characteristic (Article 17(2)). The areas to which the provisions apply are not mentioned; however, positive action measures can take place in all the areas protected by this law.

Furthermore, according to Article 18 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, positive action may be introduced by state bodies, self-governing local communities, holders of public authority, employers, educational institutions, business entities, and others depending on the nature of their operations and their activities (Article 18(1)). Positive action must pursue a legitimate aim of eliminating the fact-based, less favourable situation of individuals with a certain personal characteristic, and they must be appropriate and necessary for the elimination of such a situation. The entities that adopt positive action must regularly check whether continuing with the measures is substantiated and justified. If they establish that the aim of their implementation has been achieved, they must terminate the measures immediately (Article 18(2)).

Articles 17 and 18 of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act also contain measures that could be considered positive measures, even though they are not officially designated as such. For more information see section 2.8.

According to its *Annual Report for 2021*,¹⁴⁹ the Advocate of the Principle of Equality found that this opportunity to take positive action was underdeveloped in Slovenia. The entities that are entitled to take this opportunity are not doing so, either in recruitment or in policy making. The Advocate assesses that one of the reasons for not taking positive action is the lack of equality data, which are essential to assess the unequal positions of certain groups and to legitimise the use of positive action.¹⁵⁰

b) Quotas in employment for persons with disabilities

In Slovenia, national law provides for quotas for the employment of persons with disabilities.

There is a quota system in place for employing persons with disabilities which applies to all companies (the mandatory proportion of persons with disabilities to be employed out of the total of all employees working for a certain employer). The quota, which differs depending on the main activity of the employer, was set by a Government regulation following a proposal by the Economic and Social Council.¹⁵¹ The duty for quotas applies to

¹⁴⁹ The report for 2022 has not yet been published.

¹⁵⁰ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2022), *Annual Report for 2021 (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2021)*, p. 117, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

¹⁵¹ Decree establishing the employment quota for persons with disabilities (*Uredba o določitvi kvote za zaposlovanje invalidov*), adopted on 27 March 2014, available at: <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=URED6489>.

all companies which employ at least 20 employees (employers who have at least 20 employees are obliged to employ persons with disabilities as 2 % to 6 % of the total number of employees). Companies that do not meet the quota must pay contributions to the Fund for Promoting the Employment of Persons with Disabilities equivalent to 70 % of the minimum wage for each person with disabilities that the employer should have hired according to the quota. The number and proportion of persons with disabilities in employment has not changed significantly since the establishment of the quota system: 32 682 employees in 2006, which amounts to 3.99 % of all employees in Slovenia, in comparison with 32 143 employees in 2016, which amounts to 3.86 % of all employment.¹⁵² Data for the subsequent years is not available, as the evaluation that was carried out was a single study without a follow-up.

According to the annual report on the functioning of the fund, the quota system is functioning as, despite economic crisis, the number of persons with disabilities in employment remains relatively stable.¹⁵³ Furthermore, the number of employers exceeding the quota has increased each year, from 2 528 in 2006 to 6 338 in 2021.¹⁵⁴ The report for 2022 is not yet available.

In Slovenia, the majority of employers still prefer to pay the allowances (set out by the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act on which the quota is based) to the Fund than to employ persons with disabilities according to mandatory quotas, which is a choice they have at their disposal in accordance with the law. The option of paying into the Fund instead of following the mandatory quotas is by nature a type of sanction for those employers who do not meet the quota. If the employer does not meet the quota or pay into the Fund, the Fund issues a decision which can be enforced against the employer. In 2020, the Fund paid approximately EUR 33.6 million of subsidies to employers for adaptations of workplaces, subsidised employment and other benefits related to vocational rehabilitation, and received around EUR 38.3 million of payments as contributions replacing the duty to employ persons with disabilities in line with quotas, and other payments.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Univrztetni rehabilitacijski inštitut Republike Slovenije – Soča (2017), *Evalvacija zaposlitvene rehabilitacije za leto 2016* (Evaluation of Vocational Rehabilitation for 2016), available at: http://www.rczr.uri-soca.si/f/docs/2017/01_Evalvacija_zaposlitvene_rehabilitacije_za_leto_2016_30_06_2017.pdf.

¹⁵³ *Annual Report on the functioning of the Public Guarantee, Maintenance and Disability Fund of the Republic of Slovenia for 2021*, available at: <http://www.sklad-kadri.si/si/info/o-skladu/informacije-javnega-znacaja/letno-porocilo/>.

¹⁵⁴ *Annual Report on the functioning of the Public Guarantee, Maintenance and Disability Fund of the Republic of Slovenia for 2021*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁵ *Annual Report on the functioning of the Public Guarantee, Maintenance and Disability Fund of the Republic of Slovenia for 2021*, p. 47.

6 REMEDIES AND ENFORCEMENT

6.1 Judicial and/or administrative procedures (Article 7 Directive 2000/43, Article 9 Directive 2000/78)

a) Available procedures for enforcing the principle of equal treatment

In Slovenia, the following procedures exist for enforcing the principle of equal treatment:

Competent body	Type of case	Outcome
Human Rights Ombudsman	Violation of Article 14 of the Constitution (prohibition of discrimination)	Non-binding decision
Advocate of the Principle of Equality	Violation of the Protection Against Discrimination Act (PADA)	Binding decision and recommendations, but no sanctions.
Ethics Commission of Journalists	Code of Ethics of the Slovenian Association of Journalists	Non-binding judgments and opinions
Labour Inspector	Violation of Article 6 or 6.a of the Employment Relationship Act	Binding decision, sanctions
Other Inspectorates	Violations of other laws in the fields protected by PADA	Binding decision, sanctions
Administrative procedures, Administrative Court	Discrimination in administrative procedures	Binding decision, sanctions
Civil courts	Compensation claims due to discrimination	Binding decision, sanctions
Labour and Social Court	Violation of Article 6 or 6a of the Employment Relationship Act, discrimination related to social security	Binding decision, sanctions
Criminal courts	Discrimination amounting to a crime	Binding decision, sanctions
Constitutional Court	Violation of Article 14 of the Constitution (prohibition of discrimination)	Binding decision, no sanctions

- *Informal: Human Rights Ombudsman*

The principle of equal treatment and the ban on discrimination is incorporated into the Constitution as the first provision among those ensuring fundamental human rights (Article 14). The Human Rights Ombudsman¹⁵⁶ is a body that is competent to examine informal complaints and an independent and unbiased form of informal protection that is available to individuals in relation to state authorities, local authorities and bearers of public authority. The Ombudsman has competence only in the public sector. The decisions of the Ombudsman are not binding.

¹⁵⁶ The basis for the institution of Human Rights Ombudsman is found in Article 159 of the Constitution. The activities of the Human Rights Ombudsman are defined in the Slovenian Human Rights Ombudsman Act (*Zakon o Varuhu človekovih pravic*), 20 December 1993, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO300, and the Rules of Procedure of the Human Rights Ombudsman, 18 October 1995, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=POSL7. The duties and competencies of the Ombudsman are based on the classic Scandinavian model.

Any individual who believes that their human rights or fundamental freedoms (including the right to equal treatment) have been violated by an act or deed committed by a public body may lodge a petition with the Ombudsman to start proceedings,¹⁵⁷ and the Ombudsman can also institute proceedings on its own initiative. The procedure is free of charge. By law, the Human Rights Ombudsman has the authority to obtain, from the state and other bodies that it may monitor, all information, irrespective of the degree of confidentiality, to perform investigations, and in this capacity to call witnesses for questioning. It does not have the authority to monitor the work of judges and courts except in cases of improperly delayed procedures or clear abuse of power. It is competent only in relation to matters in the public sphere; however, it can also monitor the activities of state bodies in reported cases from the private sector. The Human Rights Ombudsman issues annual reports on the exercise of human rights, which are considered by the National Assembly. Complaints due to discrimination are often brought to the attention of the Ombudsman.

- *Informal: Ethics Commission of Journalists*

Printed media is monitored by the Ethics Commission of Journalists. This is a self-regulating body, composed of nine elected journalists and editors as well as two representatives of the public, which ensures that the members of the journalistic community and the authors of journalistic texts and articles comply with ethical and professional rules. Complaints can be made on breaches of the Code of Journalists of Slovenia, which prohibits stereotyping (Article 20) and incitement to violence and intolerance (Article 21). Between 2011 and 2022, there were 33 complaints under Article 20 and 32 complaints under Article 21. The Commission found that there were 15 and eight breaches respectively.¹⁵⁸ The Commission does not impose sanctions; it only determines whether there has been a violation of the code.

- *Formal: Procedure on establishing discrimination conducted by the Advocate of the Principle of Equality*

The Advocate has competence in the public and private sectors.

The procedure conducted by the Advocate is formal and binding. It is also free of charge (Article 35(1)). Anyone who believes that he or she has been discriminated against may file a complaint with the Advocate. This individual has the status of a party to the procedure (Article 33 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act). As parties to the procedure, the complainants have the right to access the files of the case, except for data which have been marked by the Advocate as sensitive personal data (Article 35(2)), in line with the Personal Data Protection Act. The Advocate may also start a procedure on its own initiative if it is made aware about the existence of discrimination on the basis of an anonymous complaint, a complaint from a third person or in another way (Article 34(1)). To conduct a procedure in such cases, the Advocate must obtain the consent of the individual who has experienced discrimination, unless it is not possible to determine who experienced discrimination; if a larger group was discriminated against; or if the case is more generally important in the context of protection from discrimination (Article 34(2)). An individual who experienced discrimination but who was not the one who filed the complaint also has the right to participate in the procedure (Article 34(3)), even though he or she is not formally a party to the procedure.

¹⁵⁷ The Rules of Procedure of the Ombudsman stipulate that the Ombudsman should perform its work in the Slovenian language. However, anyone who is not familiar with the Slovenian language may lodge a petition in their own language.

¹⁵⁸ Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (2018) *Fourth Opinion on Slovenia - adopted on 21 June 2017*, 25 January 2018, p. 24, available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/news-2018/-/asset_publisher/WSzOdQnzJ7kM/content/slovenia-publication-of-the-4th-advisory-committee-opinion?_101_INSTANCE_WSzOdQnzJ7kM_viewMode=view/.

After receiving the complaint, the Advocate verifies the statements in the complaint with the perpetrator and may demand such information and documents from the perpetrator that are necessary for the examination of the case (except for data that are classified). The information and documents must be provided to the Advocate free of charge. (Article 37(1)) The law explicitly authorises the Advocate to obtain from the alleged perpetrator, if this is required by the case and in line with the proportionality principle, personal data such as names, dates of birth, gender, addresses, citizenship, function or status, pay and other income, promotions or other work conditions, family status, health situation, or membership of a trade union or other organisation (Article 37(3)). The wording of the provision lists these types of personal data as examples, which means that other types of data could also be demanded by the Advocate if he or she decides that they are needed for the examination of the case. In a case of victimisation, the Advocate may call upon the perpetrator to protect the individual who has experienced discrimination, or those who are assisting him or her, from victimisation or eliminate the consequences of victimisation (Article 37(2)).

The law gives the Advocate the power to carry out the procedure of establishing discrimination (Article 33) or to conduct a formal inspection procedure, under the provisions of the Inspection Act¹⁵⁹ and the General Administrative Procedure Act (Article 42(1)). The inspection procedure is a monitoring procedure of the implementation of the provisions of the Protection Against Discrimination Act and any other act relevant to various types and areas of discrimination (Article 42(2)). If the inspection procedure shows that discrimination has occurred, the Advocate may issue a decision and:

- order the elimination of irregularities established through the inspection procedure, within a defined time limit;
- propose the adoption of appropriate measures for the prevention of further discrimination or for the elimination of the consequences of discrimination within a defined time limit;
- prohibit further discrimination (Article 42(3)).

The difference between the procedure on establishing discrimination and the inspection procedures are as follows:

Procedure on establishing discrimination	Inspection procedure
The victim as complainant is party to the procedure	The victim as complainant is not party to the procedure
The decision is declaratory and does not contain orders on measures to be taken by the perpetrator	The decision includes orders on measures to be taken by the perpetrator
The procedure is conducted based on general Administrative Procedure Act	The procedure is conducted based on Inspections Act

It is not possible to file an appeal against any of the two decisions of the Advocate, but it is permitted to seek judicial review before the Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia (Article 42(5)). The perpetrator must report to the Advocate on the implementation of the inspection decision within eight days of the expiry of the deadline for implementation (Article 42(6)).

If the Advocate decides that issuing a decision would not be appropriate in a particular case, it may transfer the case to the competent inspectorate (if such inspectorate exists). The Advocate also transfers the case to the competent inspectorate if the perpetrator ignores or fails to implement its decisions. In such cases, the Advocate has to prepare a motion for the instigation of a misdemeanour procedure in line with the Minor Offences

¹⁵⁹ Inspection Act (*Zakon o inšpekcijskem nadzoru*), 11 June 2002, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3209.

Act¹⁶⁰ (for more information about the procedure before the inspectorates, see the next section, as well as Section 7).

The Advocate is competent to examine complaints of alleged discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic, in both the public and private spheres.

- *Formal: Inspection and misdemeanour procedures conducted by competent inspectorates*

The Protection Against Discrimination Act defines three cases in which inspectorates are competent to examine complaints filed in line with this Act:

- According to Article 42(1), the inspection procedures, i.e. monitoring of the implementation of this Act, fall within the competence of both the Advocate and the inspectorates. This means that the complainant may file the complaint also with the inspectorate relevant to the particular area of discrimination (e.g. employment, education, health care, goods and services, social care, etc.). If violations are found, a misdemeanour procedure will also be conducted by the inspectorate.
- If the Advocate decides that issuing a decision would not be appropriate in a particular case, it may transfer the case to the competent inspectorate to carry out a misdemeanour procedure (Article 42(4)), which may result in a monetary fine.
- The Advocate may also transfer the case to the competent inspectorate if the perpetrator ignores or fails to implement its decisions. The competent inspectorate is obliged to examine the case and inform the Advocate of its decision (Article 43 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act).

The procedure before the inspector is free of charge and the decisions are binding. The inspectors work in line with the Inspection Act, which has no specific provisions on discrimination cases. In the past, there were issues with the competence of various inspectors in relation to examining cases of discrimination, as the rules were interpreted differently by the inspectorates and the Advocate. Namely, the inspectorates did not consider themselves competent for cases that were initiated with inspectorates directly by victims, with the exception of the Labour Inspectorate, since the prohibition of discrimination is included in the Employment Relationship Act, adherence to which is monitored by the Labour Inspectorate.¹⁶¹ Some other inspectorates (for example, the Education Inspector) were reluctant to examine cases about which they received complaints directly, and they insisted that the Advocate must examine the case first.

- *Administrative procedures*

Administrative procedure (used by all administrative bodies, meaning state bodies, local communities and bearers of public authority) is used if an individual was discriminated against by a state body on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic, by a decision or by another action of an administrative body.

It is regulated by the General Administrative Procedure Act,¹⁶² which is binding on administrative organs and other state bodies, local government bodies and bearers of

¹⁶⁰ Minor Offences Act (*Zakon o prekrških*), 18 December 2002, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO2537.

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Ombudsman (2008), *Letno poročilo Varuha človekovih pravic Republike Slovenije za leto 2007* (Annual Report for 2007), p. 40, available at: www.varuh-rs.si/publikacije-gradiva-izjave/letna-porocila-priporocila-dz-odzivna-porocila-vlade/.

¹⁶² General Administrative Procedure Act (*Zakon o splošnem upravnem postopku*), 16 September 1999, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1603.

public authority. Any natural person or legal person in private or public law can be a party to an administrative procedure. They can file a request to begin proceedings or a claim may be filed against them. A group of people may also be a party, in as much as it can be the holder of rights and duties (Article 42). In administrative procedure, it is not obligatory for a party to be represented by a lawyer; any physical person with full legal capacity can represent them. Payment for applications and decisions is regulated by the Administrative Fees Act.¹⁶³

Article 137 of the General Administrative Procedure Act states that if there are two or more parties with opposing interests involved in the procedure, the public official who is conducting the procedure must seek throughout the course of the proceeding to achieve a settlement by the parties.

In response to administrative decisions, judicial review may be sought before the Administrative Court.¹⁶⁴

- *Judicial procedures: Courts*

Civil procedure

A civil court procedure conducted in accordance with the Civil Procedure Act shall be used for claiming material and non-material damages arising from a violation of the principle of equal treatment on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic.

Article 39 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act defines certain specifics of legal protection from discrimination. Namely, the person who believes that he or she is or has been discriminated against may file an action to demand the termination of the discrimination, payment of compensation due to the discrimination and publication of the judgment in the media (Article 39(1)). Due to exposure to discrimination, the individual is entitled to compensation paid by the perpetrator of between EUR 500 and EUR 5 000 (Article 39(2)). In determining the amount of compensation, the competent court takes into account the duration of the discrimination, exposure to aggravated forms of discrimination and other circumstances of the case (Article 39(3)). The claim for the publication of the judgment in the media is granted if the court, taking into account the circumstances of the case, decides that the publication of the judgment is needed to eliminate the consequences of discrimination or for the prevention of discrimination in other similar cases. The judgment is published in an anonymised way (Article 39(4)). The law is not clear on whether anonymity should apply to only the claimant's information or whether it should also apply to the perpetrator's information. For adjudicating actions under this provision, the courts shall apply the provisions of the Civil Procedure Act (Article 39(5)).

This is a provision in relation to which two possible interpretations could arise (although there is as yet no case law to confirm one or the other). The first possible interpretation is that this provision replaces all the provisions of the Obligations Act¹⁶⁵ on compensation (see Section 6.5 on remedies and sanctions), in line with the principle of *lex specialis derogat legi generali*. The second possible interpretation is that this is only an additional provision that complements the general rules on compensation and tort law and alleviates access to compensation. In the opinion of the author, this interpretation is more

¹⁶³ Administrative Fees Act (*Zakon o upravnih taksah*), 26 January 2000, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO2146.

¹⁶⁴ Administrative Dispute Act (*Zakon o upravnem sporu*), 28 September 2006, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4732.

¹⁶⁵ Obligations Act (*Obligacijski zakonik*), 3 October 2001, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1263>.

appropriate. Namely, it provides for a clear legal basis to claim compensation solely on the basis of the fact that discrimination has taken place, which was not clear before. At the same time, the individual should have the opportunity to claim compensation on the usual grounds, such as lost income, material damages, and costs and expenses that might have occurred because of discrimination. In addition, since there is a ceiling for compensation for discrimination, this would mean that under no circumstances could the person who experienced discrimination claim compensation exceeding EUR 5 000, should the first interpretation prevail. If the person was discriminated against in the form of termination of employment, the lost income that they might wish to claim could easily exceed EUR 5 000. Therefore, if the first interpretation prevailed, this would put discrimination victims in a significantly worse position in the area of claiming compensation in comparison with complainants in other areas

Parties can represent themselves in first instance procedures. Alternatively, they can choose someone to represent them before the local court in line with the Civil Procedure Act (dealing with disputes over matters with a maximum value of EUR 20 000), while in other courts the authorised person must be a lawyer or an individual who has passed the bar examination.

The Protection Against Discrimination Act introduced additional rules on representation, related to the legal standing of associations and the Advocate, which are further analysed in Section 6.2. Article 41(1) states that, without prejudice to the provisions of the Civil Procedure Act, the person who experienced discrimination may authorise the Advocate or a non-governmental organisation active in the field of protection from discrimination or human rights to represent him or her in judicial proceedings under Article 39 of the Act. In the name of the Advocate or the NGO, the procedural acts may be performed only by a person who is employed by the Advocate or is a representative of the NGO and has passed the state legal exam (Article 41(1)). This rule is stricter than the general rules for representation in civil procedures. Under the general rules, representatives of state bodies or legal persons do not have to have passed the state legal exam for cases concerning disputes below the value of EUR 20 000.

Again, two possible interpretations could arise here (although there is no case law that would confirm one or the other). According to the first interpretation, this law is specific to the general rules and should also be used for minor disputes in line with the principle of *lex specialis derogat legi generali*, while under the second interpretation, this makes no sense as it would put discrimination victims in a worse situation in comparison with other complainants and would make access to justice more difficult for them. As in the case of complainants who are represented by trade unions, it would make more sense to impose more lenient, rather than harsher, conditions for representation. Since the general provisions of the Civil Procedure Act are more lenient for the victims of discrimination and their authorised representatives, the courts could also apply those.

When filing a lawsuit, the victim must pay a fee defined on the basis of the Court Fees Act,¹⁶⁶ depending on the value of the subject of the dispute. In social or labour disputes which do not relate to property, the amount of the fee is EUR 20. Court fees are not payable in collective labour disputes and some social disputes.

Judicial proceedings for human rights cases are usually expensive, and individuals with limited financial means cannot afford such a lengthy and expensive procedure. The Free Legal Aid Act¹⁶⁷ was adopted with the intention of remedying this situation. This Act enables individuals to acquire the services of a lawyer at the expense of the state. The Court Fees Act (Article 13) includes the possibility of an exemption from judicial tax. An individual who

¹⁶⁶ Court Fees Act (*Zakon o sodnih taksah*), 1 April 2008, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4729.

¹⁶⁷ Free Legal Aid Act (*Zakon o brezplačni pravni pomoči*), 31 May 2001, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1265.

proves that their survival or the survival of their dependants would be jeopardised if they were to pay judicial taxes may be exempted from this payment.

In respect of the obligation to make courts accessible for persons with disabilities and to make court documents accessible in scripts or other ways chosen by the person with disabilities, the 2010 Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities would apply.

Procedure before Labour and Social Courts

In cases of discrimination related to employment and social rights, the parties may file a claim before the labour and social courts. There are special provisions in place for procedures before these courts defined in the Labour and Social Courts Act, which was adopted on 19 December 2003 and entered into force on 1 January 2005.¹⁶⁸ For all matters not regulated by this Act, the Civil Procedure Act is used. In addition, the rules of the Protection Against Discrimination Act on the specific aspects of legal protection from discrimination should be taken into account. Here, the same concerns about the relationship between these rules and the general compensation rules are valid (see above, discussion about civil procedures).

The rules regarding representation are the same as for civil procedures, which again raises the dilemma around harsher conditions for representation by the Advocate and NGOs in discrimination cases. In addition, there is a special mitigating provision for procedures before the labour or social courts, whereby a worker can be represented by a trade union representative if the latter has acquired the title of graduate lawyer. In procedures before a high court or the Supreme Court, a trade union representative can only appear if they have passed the bar examination.

With regard to court fees, a worker does not have to pay a court fee for individual labour disputes about entering employment, existing employment or termination of employment. Claims, decisions and appeals in procedures relating to the rights of persons with disabilities are free from court fees under the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act. The unsuccessful party must also pay other expenses incurred to the opposite party. The court can determine that the employer must bear all the expenses for taking evidence, even if the worker did not wholly succeed with their claim in the given labour dispute. In disputes over the termination of employment, the employer covers the expenses of the procedure irrespective of the outcome.

Article 68 of the Labour and Social Courts Act determines that in social disputes over the right to social insurance and social security, the social insurance institution must cover its expenses irrespective of the result of the action.

In procedures before the labour and social courts, free legal aid is accessible under the same conditions that apply in other civil procedures.

Criminal procedure

Criminal procedure is regulated by the Criminal Procedure Act, according to which cases of discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, race, colour, religion, ethnic roots, gender, language, political or other belief, sexual orientation, social status, birth, education, social position or any other characteristic, which amount to criminal acts, can be tried. Hate speech is defined in Article 297 of the new Penal Code, which states that anyone who publicly encourages or incites ethnic, racial, religious or other hatred or intolerance, or incites another type of intolerance due to physical or intellectual disabilities or sexual orientation, shall be sanctioned with imprisonment of up to two years. The same punishment is laid out for those who publicly spread ideas of the superiority of one race

¹⁶⁸ Labour and Social Courts Act (*Zakon o delovnih in socialnih sodiščih*), 19 December 2003, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3657.

over another or cooperate with any racist activity, or deny, diminish the meaning of, approve of, ridicule or advocate for genocide, holocaust, crimes against humanity, war crimes, aggression or other criminal acts against humanity. If these acts are published in the public media, the editor or their deputy are also punished, except in the case of a live transmission in which it is not possible to prevent such acts.

The Penal Code also stipulates two aggravated forms of these crimes: if they were committed in an official capacity or with coercion, threat etc. In addition, Article 20 of the Protection of Public Order Act sets out the punishment for incitement to ethnic, racial, gender, religious or political intolerance or intolerance related to sexual orientation. A criminal procedure also enables the victim of a criminal offence to claim damages in the so-called adhesive procedure (regulated by Articles 100 to 111), provided that such a claim would not cause a delay in the criminal procedure itself. Under this procedure, victims can take over the prosecution of certain criminal offences if the public prosecutor withdraws the charges. Before requesting the institution of criminal proceedings, the state prosecutor can assign a minor criminal offence to conciliation procedures, but they must consider the type and nature of the offence and also the personal characteristics of the offender. If a compromise is reached, the prosecutor will dismiss the case. According to Article 443A of the Criminal Procedure Act, the judge can interrupt the trial during criminal procedures for a maximum of six months, if the state prosecutor announces the intention to refer the matter to a conciliation procedure.

In criminal procedures, parties can represent themselves in all instances of the procedure, except in cases when mandatory legal representation paid for by the state is provided. If the party has a legal representative before the Supreme Court, this must be a lawyer. The Free Legal Aid Act also applies in criminal cases.

Procedure before the Constitutional Court

Any individual who believes that their human rights and basic freedoms have been violated by a particular act by a state body, local community body or statutory authority may lodge a constitutional complaint with the Constitutional Court. Both the Constitution and the Constitutional Court Act state that the constitutional complaint is admissible only if previous legal remedies have been exhausted¹⁶⁹ and if the complaint was lodged within 60 days of the act.¹⁷⁰ There is no right to file *actio popularis* claims before the Constitutional Court. If the complaint is accepted, the panel or Constitutional Court may suspend the application of the particular act if its implementation would cause irreparable damage, or they may decide to suspend a certain law or other regulation on the basis of which the individual act was adopted. The Constitutional Court then issue a decision declaring that the appeal was unfounded, or accepts the appeal and partly or completely revokes and rescinds the act which was the subject of the appeal and returns the matter to the competent body.

If the Constitutional Court abrogates an individual act, it may also rule on a contested right or freedom if such a procedure is necessary in order to undo the consequences that have already occurred on the basis of the individual abrogated act, or if such is the nature of the constitutional right or freedom, and if a decision can be reached on the basis of the information on record.¹⁷¹ According to Article 22 of the Constitutional Court Act, the Constitutional Court is also competent to assess the constitutionality and legality of laws

¹⁶⁹ The Constitutional Court may exceptionally decide on a constitutional appeal if a violation is probable and if certain irreparable consequences would ensue for the appellant as a result of the implementation of a particular act.

¹⁷⁰ In special cases, the Constitutional Court may exceptionally rule on a constitutional complaint which has been lodged after the time limit. In such circumstances, judges become aware of cases with different backgrounds and consequences that derive from a violation. The time limit cannot therefore be interpreted strictly, and the judges should consider when the relationship ended.

¹⁷¹ Constitutional Court Act (*Zakon o ustavnem sodišču*), 8 March 1994, available at www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO325.

and other regulations with the Constitution, ratified international treaties and the general principles of international law.

Under the 2016 law, the Advocate also obtained additional powers in the field of constitutional review. Namely, if the Advocate assesses that a certain piece of legislation is discriminatory, it may lodge a claim with the Constitutional Court for constitutional review of the law or general act issued with the purpose of exercising public authority (Article 38 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act). The Constitutional Court does not have discretion as to whether the claim will be admissible or not, but it has to assess the claim based on its merits.

All court decisions are binding.

- *Mediation*

The parties may pursue a conciliation or mediation procedure. Article 309 of the Civil Procedure Act states that if someone intends to bring an action, he or she can first try to reach a compromise at a local court in the area where the opposing party is resident. The costs of such a procedure are covered by the person submitting the case. According to Article 305a of the Civil Procedure Act, after the court receives a response to a lawsuit, it is obliged to arrange a conciliation hearing before the trial. For alleged discrimination in the field of employment or social services, a procedure before the labour and social courts is available and is regulated by the Labour and Social Courts Act.

Despite the fact that a number of legal remedies exist, as described in the previous sections, the data on court cases from 2022 shows that the legal remedies available are not widely used, and when they are, they are not used properly.¹⁷² Discrimination is often only claimed in general terms, claimants sometimes do not state on which personal ground they were discriminated against, and the legal remedies provided by the Protection Against Discrimination Act are not used by victims and their lawyers.

b) Barriers and other deterrents faced by litigants seeking redress

The costs of the procedure depend on the type of procedure. Procedures that are free of charge include making a complaint to the Human Rights Ombudsman or a complaint to the Advocate of the Principle of Equality. A criminal complaint is free of charge; however, if the victim wishes to be represented by a lawyer, they must pay for one. There are exceptions to this rule, but they do not apply to discrimination cases. In civil procedures and administrative procedures, the claimants must pay court fees. If they wish to be represented by a lawyer, they must pay for one unless they are entitled to free legal aid under the Free Legal Aid Act. A complaint to the Constitutional Court is free of charge.

In addition to costs, other deterrents to seeking redress include lengthy judicial procedures, low compensation awards and ineffective protection mechanisms. In Slovenia, potential claimants face long trials due to the large numbers of new cases that are filed every year, as well as complicated legislation and court backlogs, which deter victims of discrimination from initiating court procedures. However, there have been significant improvements in recent years. The time that a case takes is reducing, and the statistics show that the number of unresolved disputes has continued to fall since 1996. In civil district courts, the duration of procedures reduced from 16.7 months in 2010 to 13.2 months in 2019. In civil county courts, the duration of procedures reduced from 16.1 months in 2010 to 12.2 months in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the trend, as in 2020, for the first time, the duration of procedures increased to 20.8 months in district

¹⁷² Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2023 – 1. del)*, p. 104, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

courts and 13.6 months in county courts.¹⁷³ This trend continued in 2021, as the duration of procedures increased to 23.5 months in district courts and 14.8 months in county courts.¹⁷⁴ The report for 2022 is not yet available.

c) Number of discrimination cases brought to justice

In Slovenia, comprehensive statistics on the number of cases related to discrimination that have been brought to justice are not available.

The statistical report on the work of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality shows that in 2022, the Advocate dealt with 410 cases, 328 of which were closed in 2022 and 82 of which continued into 2023.¹⁷⁵ In 2022, the Advocate received 315 new cases, while it was still dealing with 95 on-going cases that were transferred to 2022 from previous years.¹⁷⁶ These cases comprise both discrimination complaints and requests for assistance by victims of alleged discrimination. In 27.5 % of closed cases, the complainants did not state the personal ground, hence the case was not identified as a discrimination case (they were cases in which the complainant believed that the matter related to discrimination). Of 328 closed cases, 11.6 % referred to disability; 2.5 % to race or ethnicity; 6.5 % to age; 6.2 % to gender; 4.2 % to religion or belief; and 2.8 % to sexual orientation. In respect of fields of discrimination, 20.1 % of closed cases referred to access to goods and services; 23.1 % to employment conditions; 6.5 % to access to employment; 7.2 % to education; 13.3 % to social protection, including healthcare; 5.5 % to social benefits; 0.3 % to membership of workers' or employers' organisations; and 0.6 % to access to vocational training.¹⁷⁷

In addition, the Advocate dealt with 34 cases in which it assessed whether or not an act was discriminatory, in order to decide whether to submit it for constitutional review. In 2022, the Advocate did not initiate any constitutional reviews before the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia.

The statistical data for prosecution of the crime of incitement to hatred, violence and intolerance (under Article 297 of the Criminal Code) shows that the number of prosecutions and convictions is low:¹⁷⁸

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Crimes reported	34	13	20	37	13	32	26	38	73	37
Rejected reports	3	13	30	19	19	15	24	32	68	41
Indictments	15	1	2	1	2	6	2	7	3	3
Convictions	9	4	2		1			3	0	4

¹⁷³ Supreme Court of the Republic of Slovenia, *Letno poročilo o učinkovitosti in uspešnosti sodišč 2020* (Annual Report 2020 on the efficiency and effectiveness of the courts), available at: http://www.sodisce.si/sodna_uprava/statistika_in_letna_porocila/, pp. 43-45.

¹⁷⁴ Supreme Court of the Republic of Slovenia, *Letno poročilo o učinkovitosti in uspešnosti sodišč 2020* (Annual Report 2020 on the efficiency and effectiveness of the courts), available at: http://www.sodisce.si/sodna_uprava/statistika_in_letna_porocila/, pp. 30-31.

¹⁷⁵ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I* (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del), p. 42, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

¹⁷⁶ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – part I* (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del), p. 42, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

¹⁷⁷ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I* (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del), p. 45, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

¹⁷⁸ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2022), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I* (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del), p. 102, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Penal order		2		1		1	2	3	2	1
Acquittals				1		1		1	1	0
Rejected indictments	2						3		0	0

The statistics show that, in 2021, the Ombudsman dealt with 87 complaints in which the applicants claimed discrimination,¹⁷⁹ compared with 165 cases in 2020.¹⁸⁰ The number of complaints on the ground of ethnic origin varies (33 in 2014, 24 in 2015, 29 in 2016, 30 in 2017, five in 2018, four in 2019, eight in 2020 and three in 2021).¹⁸¹ The report for 2022 is not yet available.

d) Registration of national court decisions on discrimination cases

In Slovenia, court decisions on discrimination are not registered as such by national courts.

Judgments (except for first-instance judgments) that become final are publicly available online, with a delay of several months, after their delivery. First-instance judgments that were not appealed and became final are not published. Hence, judgments have to be obtained by submitting written inquiries to courts. In 2022, 37 court cases concerning discrimination, or in which the parties claimed that discrimination had occurred, were settled by the issuing of a final judgment.¹⁸²

Discrimination cases are, like all other court cases, kept in the database of each court by the provision of the law concerned. There is no special registry for discrimination cases, but they are kept in the general registry of the court. Many judgments are then sent to the Supreme Court, where a public database of cases is kept (www.sodnapraksa.si). The cases can be searched in the database using keywords. However, the database is not complete as first instance decisions that have not been appealed are not entered in it.

6.2 Legal standing and associations (Article 7(2) Directive 2000/43, Article 9(2) Directive 2000/78)

a) Engaging in proceedings on behalf of victims of discrimination (representing them)

In Slovenia, associations, organisations and trade unions are entitled to act on behalf of victims of discrimination, provided that they meet the conditions defined by law.

Following the Protection Against Discrimination Act, the legal framework regarding legal standing for associations, organisations and trade unions is now clearer than it was before. Article 41 of the Act states that, regardless of the rules defined in the Civil Procedure Act, the person who has experienced discrimination may authorise an NGO that is active in the field of protection from discrimination or protection of human rights to represent him or

¹⁷⁹ Human Rights Ombudsman (2022), *Letno poročilo Varuha človekovih pravic Republike Slovenije za leto 2021 (Annual Report for 2021)*, available at: https://www.varuh-rs.si/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/lp/LP_2021/Letno_porocilo_VCP_RS_za_leto_2021.pdf.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Ombudsman (2021), *Letno poročilo Varuha človekovih pravic Republike Slovenije za leto 2020 (Annual Report for 2020)*, available at: https://www.varuh-rs.si/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/lp/Letno_porocilo_VCP_2020.pdf.

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Ombudsman (2022), *Letno poročilo Varuha človekovih pravic Republike Slovenije za leto 2021 (Annual Report for 2021)*, available at: https://www.varuh-rs.si/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/lp/LP_2021/Letno_porocilo_VCP_RS_za_leto_2021.pdf.

¹⁸² Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 104, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

her in judicial proceedings based on the Protection Against Discrimination Act. The procedural acts in the judicial process in the name of the NGO may be conducted only by a person who is a representative of the NGO and who has passed a state legal exam (Article 41(1)).

This wording shows that the representative of the NGO does not have to be a member of an association and does not have to be employed by the NGO (although this can certainly be the case); it is sufficient that the representative has a mandate from the NGO allowing them to appear on its behalf. The problem with this provision relates to the fact that the person must have passed the state legal exam. It is not clear why this condition is imposed for representation in general, as under the general rules on representation from the Civil Procedures Act, the state legal exam is not required for representation before county courts adjudicating disputes worth less than EUR 20 000.

An NGO is considered to be active in the field of protection from discrimination or protection of human rights only if it has been granted the status of an organisation working in the public interest in those fields (Article 41(2)).¹⁸³ That status is granted by a competent ministry on the basis of the Associations Act¹⁸⁴ and in line with the implementing act adopted by the competent ministry for this purpose. The status of an organisation working in the public interest in those fields may also be granted to other NGOs (Article 41(3)). This covers non-profit institutes, foundations or unions of associations which are, in addition to associations, the types of NGOs that can be established in Slovenia.

Under the general rules for civil procedures, the only legal entity that can represent the party to the procedure is a law firm. Individuals who can represent the party are lawyers who have passed the state legal exam and in addition, in county court procedures, anyone with legal capacity (i.e. the capacity to perform official acts without a guardian). In criminal proceedings, the victim can be represented by anyone with legal capacity.

In administrative proceedings (which include inspection procedures before the Advocate and inspectorates), according to the General Administrative Procedure Act, the party to the procedure can be represented by anyone with legal capacity, who would in this case act on behalf of the party. It can be an individual, and it can also be a legal entity (an NGO or trade union); however, in the latter case the NGO must appoint an individual who will act on behalf of the party. According to Article 54(3) of the General Administrative Procedure Act, a professional organisation which is recognised in certain activities as being directly connected to the relevant rights and duties of the party may represent this party during administrative proceedings.

Furthermore, Article 205 of the Employment Relationship Act stipulates that a trade union whose members are employed by a specific employer may appoint or elect a trade union organiser to represent the trade union before the employer. If no trade union organiser is appointed, the trade union is represented by its chairperson. Trade union organisers have the right to exercise and to protect the rights and interests of their members vis-à-vis the employer.

According to the Constitutional Court Act, societies and other associations do not have the right to challenge regulations that interfere with the legal status of their members or other individuals. They have a legal interest only if the regulation in question interferes directly

¹⁸³ In January 2017, an implementing act was adopted to enable not only associations but also NGOs established as institutes to obtain the status of an organisation working in the public interest: Rules on Establishing the Status of an Organisation Working in the Public Interest etc. (*Pravilnik o določitvi kriterijev za izkazovanje pomembnejših dosežkov delovanja društva za podelitev statusa društva v javnem interesu na področju socialnega varstva, družinske politike, enakih možnosti žensk in moških, vojnih veteranov, vojnih invalidov in žrtev vojnega nasilja ter varnosti in zdravja pri delu*), 11 January 2017, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV13034>.

¹⁸⁴ Associations Act (*Zakon o društvih*), 30 May 2006, available at <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4242>.

with their rights, legal interests or their status as a legal person. Pursuant to Article 86 of the Civil Procedure Act, which is applied *mutatis mutandis* concerning representation in proceedings before the Constitutional Court, only a natural person can be authorised to represent a party. A legal entity can represent a party if it is a law firm.¹⁸⁵

In general, for NGOs or trade unions to be included in any of these procedures, they must be officially established and registered. There are, however, no membership and permanency requirements.

Equality and human rights organisations have initiated strategic litigation in a few discrimination cases. Amnesty International assisted Roma applicants in cases related to the construction of buildings and access to water and sanitation. The Legal Information Centre for NGOs (PIC) is active in litigating disability-related cases.

- b) Engaging in proceedings in support of victims of discrimination (joining existing proceedings)

In Slovenia, associations, organisations and trade unions are entitled to act in support of victims of discrimination.

According to the Protection Against Discrimination Act, the representative of such an NGO (with this status) may also accompany and support a victim of discrimination in judicial proceedings in cases of discrimination without representing them, provided that the victim consents to this. To ensure that consent is given, it is sufficient that the victim of discrimination at the beginning of the procedure or in the course of the procedure gives a statement that a certain person is accompanying them and that they wish for the person to be present during the procedure (Article 41(4)).

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the general provisions of the Civil Procedure Act, which is used for civil procedures and also, when appropriate, for proceedings in the Constitutional Court or the Labour and Social Court, states that a third party (*stranski intervenient*) who has a legal interest (meaning a personal interest based on statute or other regulations) can intervene in support of one of the parties at any time until the end of the proceedings. In such cases, the law does not require the party's permission for an NGO to become involved as a *stranski intervenient*.

- c) *Actio popularis*

In Slovenia, national law does not allow associations, organisations and trade unions to act in the public interest on their own behalf without a specific victim to support or represent (*actio popularis*).

Actio popularis is not provided for in Slovenian legislation. The only procedure in which an association could act, even if there is no victim, is the inspection procedure before the Advocate of the Principle of Equality (Article 34 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act). However, this would not constitute an action (a lawsuit).

- d) Class action

In Slovenia, national law allows associations, organisations and trade unions to act in the interest of more than one individual victim (class action) for claims arising from the same event.

¹⁸⁵ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, decision No. U-I-246/02, 3 April 2003.

On 26 September 2017, the National Assembly adopted the Class Actions Act.¹⁸⁶ The law became applicable on 21 April 2018. The Act defines class actions; class settlements; the rules of class action procedure; the content and impact of class actions; the procedure of payment of aggregate compensation; and the rules on costs of the procedure and financing of class actions (Article 181). The aim of the Act is to facilitate access to justice, to stop and prevent unlawful conduct of perpetrators and to enable access to compensation in the cases of mass rights violations. At the same time, the Act provides for procedural guarantees in cases of unjustified litigation (Article 1(2)). Article 2(2) states that, in the field of discrimination, the only permissible action is an action claiming termination of the discriminatory acts. Class action has not yet been used in discrimination cases.

Another procedure, similar to class action, is defined in the area of employment and social rights and is governed by the Labour and Social Courts Act (Article 40). The rules for employment-related class actions are identical to the rules for individual procedures. All the victims have to be identified (there is no class certification); the only difference is that there is more than one of them. The only special provision which is in place for class actions concerning identical cases is the so-called exemplary action, which is similar to the pilot judgment procedure conducted by the European Court of Human Rights. In an exemplary procedure, the court may first decide one test case that is identical to all the other cases (which are, in the meantime, put on hold), and the decision in this first case affects the decision in those other cases.

The law that is generally used in civil procedure for any kind of case, including class action cases, is the Civil Procedure Act. There is, however, no specific article referring to one or more claimants.

6.3 Burden of proof (Article 8 Directive 2000/43, Article 10 Directive 2000/78)

In Slovenia, national law requires a shift of the burden of proof from the complainant to the respondent.

The Protection Against Discrimination Act states in Article 40 that if a person who claims discrimination in a procedure before the Advocate or competent inspectorate, or in another procedure in which he or she demands the examination of a case of discrimination, states facts that justify the assumption that the prohibition of discrimination (including harassment) has been violated, the offender must prove that he or she did not violate this prohibition or that unequal treatment is allowed under this law (Article 40(1)).

The only procedures that are explicitly excluded from the shift of the burden of proof rule are criminal procedures (Article 40(2)). In criminal law, the burden of proof lies with the public prosecutor or private prosecutor, since it would be inappropriate if it were the defendant who had to prove that there was no basis for their conviction. Furthermore, such a rule would be contrary to the principle of the presumption of innocence.

In addition, Article 6(6) of the Employment Relationship Act states that, when a candidate or employee claims facts during a dispute which justify the assumption that the prohibition of discrimination (including harassment) was violated, the burden of proof rests with the employer. Article 47(3) has the same provision.

In general, no problems with the implementation of the rule on the shift of burden of proof have been identified.

¹⁸⁶ Class Actions Act (*Zakon o kolektivnih tožbah*), 55/17, 26 September 2017, available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7399>.

6.4 Victimisation (Article 9 Directive 2000/43, Article 11 Directive 2000/78)

In Slovenia, there are legal measures of protection against victimisation.

Victimisation is defined as a form of discrimination that is prohibited under the Protection from Discrimination Act (Article 7, indent 4). In this Act, victimisation is defined as the exposure of a victim of discrimination or a person assisting the victim to negative consequences due to their actions that aim to prevent or eliminate discrimination (Article 11). This definition does not exclude groups from protection, and it has not been interpreted as such. Furthermore, Article 6(8) of the Employment Relationship Act states that victims of discrimination and people who assist the victims may not be exposed to negative consequences for acting against discrimination. In addition, according to the Article 37(2) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, the Advocate may order the offender to apply appropriate measures to protect the victim of discrimination or an individual assisting the victim of discrimination from victimisation or to eliminate the consequences of victimisation. Since victimisation is considered to be a form of discrimination, the same measures may be taken by the Advocate as are generally available when violations occur (see above, Section 6.1 on Judicial and Administrative Procedures).

Article 78 of the Employment Relationship Act states that, after ending a labour relationship, the employer shall return to the employee all their documents and shall issue them with a document certifying the type of work that they were performing. The employer must not include any information in the certificate that would render it more difficult for the employee to enter into a new labour relationship. This provision means that the employer may not victimise the employee who has been discriminated against while working for the employer after the employment contract has been terminated. If an employer insults an employee or acts violently, or if the employer does not prevent such behaviour by other employees, the employee affected may, according to Article 111 of the Employment Relationship Act, end the contract without notice after eight days if they have notified the employer and the Labour Inspectorate in writing. This provision means that the employee may end the contract almost without notice and may not be victimised by the employer not allowing them to leave. Article 112 of the Employment Relationship Act protects trade union representatives from losing their jobs, which is a provision that also applies in cases in which trade union representatives act on behalf of victims of discrimination.

The rule of the shift of the burden of proof applies to both prohibition of discrimination and prohibition of victimisation, in accordance with Articles 7, 11 and 40 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act.

6.5 Sanctions and remedies (Article 15 Directive 2000/43, Article 17 Directive 2000/78)

a) Applicable sanctions in cases of discrimination – in law and in practice

Article 26 of the Constitution grants everyone the right to compensation for damage caused through unlawful actions in connection with the performance of any function or other activity by a person or body performing such a function or activity under state authority or local community authority, or as a bearer of public authority. Any individual suffering damage also has the right to claim compensation directly from the individual or body that caused the damage.

In accordance with Article 33 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, the person who believes that he or she was discriminated against may lodge a complaint. The Advocate deals with the complaint through the investigation procedure defined in Articles 33 to 37 and 42 to 43 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act (see above, Section 6.1 on

administrative and judicial procedures). An individual who believes that he or she was discriminated against may also lodge a complaint directly with the competent inspectorates, which are authorised to carry out inspection procedures in line with Article 42 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act. If the violations are established and the measures imposed on the offender by the Advocate or the inspectorates are not respected, the inspectorates will carry out misdemeanour procedures in line with the Minor Offences Act (Article 44 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act).

The law also includes penalties for acts of discrimination. According to Article 45 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, different fees for minor offences are defined depending on the type of offence: the fine for a legal person, individual entrepreneur or an 'individual with autonomous activity' (a formal arrangement under which it is possible to perform economic activity in Slovenia; a type of self-employment) ranges from EUR 3 000 to EUR 20 000 for exposing an individual to direct or indirect discrimination or to harassment; giving instructions to discriminate; or victimising an individual who assists the victim of discrimination (Article 45(1)). If such types of discrimination are perpetrated by an individual (a natural person), the prescribed fine is EUR 250 to EUR 1 200 (Article 45(3)).

A higher upper limit for the fine is defined for aggravated forms of discrimination perpetrated by the same types of offenders: a fine of between EUR 3 000 and EUR 30 000 is prescribed if the offender victimises the victim of discrimination or exposes a person or people to aggravated forms of discrimination (Article 45(2)), i.e. to multiple discrimination, mass discrimination, long-term or continuous discrimination, or discrimination which causes or could cause irreversible consequences for the individual in relation to the damage to his or her legal situation, rights or obligations, in particular if it is perpetrated against children or other vulnerable people (Article 12 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act). If such discrimination is perpetrated by an individual (a natural person), the prescribed fine is EUR 500 to EUR 3 000 (Article 45(4)).

In cases of discrimination perpetrated by legal persons, additional fines may be imposed on responsible representatives of the legal persons. The responsible representative of a state body, local community, legal person or individual entrepreneur or of an 'individual with autonomous activity' where the misdemeanour took place shall be punished with a fine of between EUR 250 and EUR 2 500 (Article 45(5)) or, in the case of aggravated forms of discrimination, with a fine of between EUR 500 and EUR 5 000 (Article 45(6) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act).

In theory, the size of the fine depends on the seriousness of the offence and negligence or intent on the part of the offender.¹⁸⁷ However, there is a serious deficiency in provisions prescribing misdemeanours and fines for them in a range from a minimum to a maximum. Namely, there should be a direct authorisation in the Protection Against Discrimination Act for the inspections to impose fines higher than the minimum (the same applied to the previous Act Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment; this is an on-going problem). This limitation derives from the Minor Offences Act, which defines two types of procedures: regular procedures and fast procedures. For fast procedures – by means of which a large majority of misdemeanour cases are handled in practice – this Act states that the fines issued, which are defined in a range, may be imposed only at the minimum amount, if the law which defines specific misdemeanours does not state otherwise (Article 52(3) of the Minor Offences Act). This is a general rule which requires that the specific legislation which defines the fines in a range from a minimum to a maximum explicitly authorises the inspectorate to issue a fine higher than the minimum. Simply having a definition of a fine within a range is not sufficient. Since there is no such explicit authorisation in the Protection Against Discrimination Act, this effectively means that the fines may not exceed the

¹⁸⁷ Minor Offences Act (*Zakon o prekrških*), 18 December 2002, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO2537.

minimum prescribed amounts. In practice, the fines are usually not imposed by the inspectorates. If discrimination is found, an admonition is usually issued.

The fines go towards state revenue.

The Employment Relationship Act 2013 stipulates the employer's liability for damage in accordance with the provisions of tort law when the employer infringes an anti-discrimination provision. The Act establishes the elements that are used to define the amount of compensation for which the employer who acts in a discriminatory way is liable. Article 8 of the Act states that, in the case of a violation of the prohibition of discrimination or bullying in the workplace, the employer is liable with regard to the candidate or worker in line with the general provisions of civil law. Non-pecuniary damages for a candidate or worker cover mental pain suffered as a result of unequal or discriminatory treatment by an employer; a lack of protection from sexual or other harassment; or bullying in the workplace. The amount of monetary compensation for non-pecuniary damages must be defined in such a way that compensation is effective and proportionate to the damages suffered by the candidate or worker and dissuades the employer from repeating the violations. Article 217(1) of this Act states that an employer who is a legal person or an individual entrepreneur shall be fined between EUR 3 000 and EUR 20 000, for putting a job candidate or an employee in an unequal position.

Article 131 of the Penal Code prescribes punishment for individuals who commit the criminal offence of violating equality. In accordance with Article 131(2), anyone who persecutes an individual or an organisation due to their advocacy of equality shall be punished. In the event of an offence under the first or the second paragraph of Article 131 being committed by an official through an abuse of office or of official authority, the official shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a maximum term of three years. The provision of Article 116 of the Penal Code specifically defines the criminal act of murder committed due to a violation of equality and prescribes a sentence of imprisonment of at least 15 years. Article 265 of the Penal Code states that anyone who intentionally causes severe pain or suffering for a reason based on violation of equality shall be sanctioned with imprisonment of between one and 10 years. If this is caused by a person in an official capacity, the sanction is imprisonment of between three and 12 years. As yet, there have been no cases in relation to these provisions.

Article 297 of the Penal Code stipulates that anyone who publicly encourages or incites ethnic, racial, religious or other hatred or intolerance, or incites another type of intolerance, due to physical or intellectual disabilities or sexual orientation, shall be sanctioned with imprisonment of up to two years. The same punishment is foreseen for those who publicly spread ideas of the superiority of one race over another or cooperate with any racist activity, or deny, diminish the meaning of, approve of, ridicule or advocate genocide, the Holocaust, crimes against humanity, war crimes, aggression or other criminal acts against humanity. If these acts are published in the public media, the editor or their deputy are also punished, except in the case of a live transmission in which it is not possible to prevent such acts.

Until 2020, the prosecution and conviction of incitement to hate had almost completely ceased. In most cases, punishments of imprisonment of between one and six months were issued, but they were suspended in the sense that they would not be executed if the perpetrator did not commit another crime within a certain period (usually one or two years) set by the court. In The first (landmark) Supreme Court case on hate speech was decided in 2019. The case concerned an individual who used online hate speech as an incitement to violence against Roma.. The prosecution claimed that, according to the law (specifically, Article 297 of the Penal Code), there is no need to demonstrate a concrete disruption of public order when hate speech is threatening, abusive or insulting. For such hate speech to be punishable, the abstract possibility of disruption of public order is already sufficient. The Supreme Court agreed with the prosecution and clarified that concrete disruption of

public order is not required in such cases; for a conviction, it is sufficient to prove that such hate speech had the ability and the potential to cause a disruption to public order, taking into account the content, nature, place and other circumstances of the use of hate speech.¹⁸⁸ The statistics for 2020 indicated that this Supreme Court judgment has already had an impact on the case law of prosecution and lower courts, as the number of indictments and final judgments was at its highest since 2013. However, the data for the years 2021 and 2022 did not confirm this trend. Detailed statistics are visible from the following chart:¹⁸⁹

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Criminal reports	34	13	20	37	13	32	26	38	73	37
Dismissed criminal reports	36	13	30	19	19	15	24	32	68	41
Indictments	15	1	2	1	2	6	2	7	3	3
Convictions	9	4	2	/	1	/	/	3	0	4
Judgments on penalty orders	/	2	/	1	/	1	2	3	2	1
Acquittals	/	/	/	1	/	1	/	1	1	0
Rejection judgments	2	/	/	/	/	/	3	/		0

The Penal Code also stipulates two aggravated forms of these crimes: if they were committed in an official capacity or with coercion, threat etc. Materials and objects which contain messages with content as described in Article 297(1), as well as the facilities for their production, duplication and distribution, should be confiscated. Article 198 of the Penal Code states that anyone who limits or restricts a person's right to free access to any position of employment on terms required by law, is fined or imprisoned for up to one year. Article 197 of the Penal Code imposes a punishment of imprisonment of up to two years for anyone who uses sexual harassment, psychological violence, bullying or unequal treatment in the workplace to cause humiliation or fear in another employee.

If these acts have consequences such as psychological, psychosomatic or physical illness or a reduction in an employee's effectiveness at work, the punishment is imprisonment of up to three years.

Article 202 of the Penal Code punishes those who deliberately fail to act in line with the rules governing social security and therefore deprive an individual of a right or place a limit on it. An offender is punished with a fine or imprisonment of up to one year. There have

¹⁸⁸ Supreme Court of the Republic of Slovenia, judgment No. I Ips 65803/2012 of 4 July 2019. Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2021), *Annual Report for 2020 – Part I*, p. 108, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Redno-letno-porocilo-za-letno-2020-ANNUAL-REPORT-2019-SYSTEMIC-OVERVIEW.pdf>.

not yet been any cases in relation to these provisions. In addition, Article 20 of the Protection of Public Order Act sets out the punishment for inciting ethnic, racial, gender, religious or political intolerance or intolerance related to sexual orientation, with a fine of up to EUR 835.

Articles 230 to 233 of the Execution of Judgments in Civil Matters and Insurance of Claims Act¹⁹⁰ regulate the reinstatement of an employee to their position of employment after reinstatement has been awarded following a legal procedure. Article 233 states that an employee who proposes to return to their position of employment may ask the court to decide that the employer must pay the employee sums of money that correspond to their wages from the end of court proceedings until their reinstatement (the nature of the damages is pecuniary and there is no statutory upper limit). The sum payable is stipulated by the court and should amount to the level of the employee's wages as if they had been working. The employee's right to demand past wages be paid is not affected by this regulation. If the court decides partially in favour of the employee, the employee can seek full compensation before the court. Sanctions for legal persons that are responsible are described in Section 3.1.2.

b) Compensation – maximum and average amounts

The general legislation which defines the rules of tort law – the Obligations Act – contains no upper limit on the compensation that can be awarded by a court decision. Compensation is a sanction which depends on the damage caused to the victim. The damage must be proven and is determined by the court. If awarded, the compensation is paid to the victim.

The Protection Against Discrimination Act introduced additional provisions on claiming compensation and other remedial measures in cases of discrimination. Among others it states that a person who believes that he or she is or has been discriminated against may file an action to claim payment of compensation due to discrimination (Article 39(1)) and that, due to exposure to discrimination, the individual is entitled to compensation paid by the perpetrator of between EUR 500 and EUR 5 000 (Article 39(2)). In determining the amount of compensation, the competent court takes into account the duration of the discrimination, exposure to aggravated forms of discrimination and other circumstances of the case (Article 39(3)). In 2021, compensation was granted in two instances based on this provision: EUR 1 000 with a final decision by a higher court finding discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief,¹⁹¹ and EUR 2 000 by a first instance court in a case of age discrimination (this judgment has been appealed).¹⁹² In the latter case, the appellate court in 2022 upheld the first instance court's decision and confirmed that the compensation granted to the amount of EUR 2 000 was appropriate.¹⁹³ In 2022, no other cases of compensation could be identified.

As already mentioned in Section 6.1.a in relation to civil procedures, it is not clear from the law whether this provision is complementary to, or replaces, the general provisions on compensation in the Obligations Act.

If it is the former, the law now places a ceiling on the amount of compensation that can be claimed solely for the fact that an individual has been exposed to discrimination, but at the same time the individual may claim compensation for other types of damages (e.g. pecuniary damages and other types of non-pecuniary damages apart from the exposure to discrimination). If it is the latter (if this provision is in fact *lex specialis* and replaces the general compensation system when it comes to discrimination cases), discrimination cases are an exception to the rule that there is no formal ceiling to compensation in the Slovenian

¹⁹⁰ Execution of Judgments in Civil Matters and Insurance of Claims Act (*Zakon o izvršbi in zavarovanju*), 30 June 1998, available at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1008.

¹⁹¹ Higher Court Ljubljana, judgment No. II Cp 1016/2021 of 14 July 2021.

¹⁹² County Court Ljubljana, judgment No. IV P 1366/2019 of 8 October 2021.

¹⁹³ Higher Court Ljubljana, judgment No. I Cp 616/2022, 28 June 2022.

law. As the legislature did not explicitly exclude discrimination cases from the general tort law provisions and did not provide any reasons for such an interpretation, in the opinion of the author these additional provisions on compensation were adopted only to exclude any doubt that a victim is entitled to compensation for the sole reason of being exposed to discrimination, which was not so clear before. Consequently, the ceiling for compensation is in place only with regard to compensation awarded precisely on these grounds.

In a compensation claim lodged due to alleged discrimination, the complainant must specify three out of four elements of responsibility for damages (these three elements are unlawful act, damages and the nexus between unlawful acts and damages). The fourth element – responsibility for damages – is assumed and it is for the defendant to prove that they are not responsible for damages¹⁹⁴

In recent years, there have been only a few cases (in addition to those mentioned above) in which courts have awarded compensation to victims: the High Labour and Social Court awarded compensation of EUR 3 500 in 2009,¹⁹⁵ the Labour and Social Court in Ljubljana awarded EUR 11 346.69¹⁹⁶ and the Labour Court in Maribor awarded EUR 6000 in 2009.¹⁹⁷ In 2021, none of the lawsuits filed concerning discrimination within the scope of this report was successful. Data for 2022 are not yet available.

c) Assessment of the sanctions

Due to the very low number of sanctions issued in cases of discrimination, it is difficult to assess whether they are effective and dissuasive. However, there are a few indications on which to base an assessment.

The case law shows that compensation payments awarded in disputes in which claimants are successful are sufficiently high in order to consider such sanctions dissuasive from the perspective of an average person (EUR 3 000 is equal to three average monthly net salaries in Slovenia). However, taking into account that the compensation is usually not paid by a natural person but by a legal person (employer), compensation payments are not high. There is a lack of more recent case law involving compensation.

The fines prescribed by the Protection Against Discrimination Act and Employment Relationship Act are theoretically sufficiently high; however, they are hardly ever implemented in practice due to the low number of reported cases and the lack of willingness of inspectorates to deal with issues of discrimination. For example, in 2020, the Market Inspectorate issued a fine of EUR 3 000 to the legal person and EUR 250 to the responsible person of the legal person, based on a proposal by the Advocate of the Principle of Equality in a case concerning discrimination on the grounds of religion.¹⁹⁸

In addition, there is a problem with the lack of explicit authorisation to impose fines in the range prescribed (in fast procedures) and not only the minimum fine. Consequently, it is questionable whether fines of EUR 3 000 for legal persons and EUR 250 for natural persons may be assessed as being sufficiently high and therefore effective.

The sanctions of imprisonment issued in hate crime and hate speech cases are always suspended, and it is therefore questionable whether they have any impact on the perpetrators.

¹⁹⁴ Higher Labour and Social Court, decision No. Pdp 729/2011, 7 October 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Higher Labour and Social Court, decision No. Pdp 915/2008, 14 May 2009.

¹⁹⁶ Labour and Social Court in Ljubljana, decision No. IPd 804/2007 of 6 January 2009.

¹⁹⁷ Labour Court in Maribor, decision No. Pd 828/2008, 26 August 2009.

¹⁹⁸ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, decision No. 0700-2/2019, 4 July 2019.

7 BODY FOR THE PROMOTION OF EQUAL TREATMENT (Article 13 Directive 2000/43)

7.1 Body designated for the promotion of equal treatment irrespective of racial/ethnic origin according to Article 13 of the Racial Equality Directive

The Protection Against Discrimination Act, which was passed on 21 April 2016, provided for the establishment of a new equality body, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality. The Advocate of the Principle of Equality has been an independent state body since November 2016. The Advocate works on all grounds covered by the Protection Against Discrimination Act and is not limited to addressing race and ethnicity.

The Advocate provides information, counselling and advocacy free of charge on an equal basis to anyone who feels that they have been discriminated against. The Advocate operates in the official language, but respects the right of people to use their own language in the proceedings, in accordance with the regulations.

The premises of the Advocate are accessible to persons with disabilities. The offices can be reached by a lift and the building has bathroom facilities to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities. The Advocate provides free-of-charge Slovenian sign language interpretation, and its operation is also conducted in Braille. The Advocate also strives to provide information and, where necessary, its operation in easy-to-read format. The Advocate's website is in line with WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.0.

In 2022, the Advocate continued to perform activities to increase the visibility of the equality body across the general public and state administration, and to increase the dissemination of information on protection against discrimination. The Advocate informs the public about all activities performed through the official website; through social media such as Facebook and Twitter¹ and through media appearances by the head of the institution. In 2022, the Advocate prepared 65 press releases and answered 43 journalistic questions. On the website www.zagovornik.si, 78 updates about the Advocate's work were published, and a website was provided with basic information about the work and competence of the equality body in the Italian and Hungarian languages. In 2022, the Advocate attended 22 educational events (i.e. providing lectures). The Advocate produced two new leaflets, 'Say No to Discrimination against the Elderly' and 'Say No to Discrimination against Young People'.¹⁹⁹ Between 2018 and 2022, the Advocate managed to strengthen its position, increasing the number of staff and improving its visibility.

7.2 Political, economic and social context of the designated body

The adoption of the law in 2016, which provided for a reform of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality and its transformation from a one-civil-servant body to a fully operational independent state body with 20 employees at the end of 2021, shows that there was a certain level of political support for the maintenance of the strengthened capacity of the equality body. The main incentive for this was the infringement procedure initiated by the European Commission. The less positive side of the establishment of the new equality body was the reluctance of the Ministry of Finance to ensure sufficient funds for it to become fully operational, i.e. to move to appropriate and wheelchair-accessible premises suitable for the operation of a state body, to hire personnel and to carry out the duties enshrined in its mandate.

Civil society organisations were supportive of the reform and carried out an independent campaign to support the Advocate's call for additional resources. As part of the campaign, the organisations staged a performance in which they set up a mock single-desk office in front of the Government building, in order to illustrate how the body was expected to

¹⁹⁹ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 28, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

function with such limited resources. The campaign was extensively covered by the media.²⁰⁰

7.3 Institutional architecture

In Slovenia, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality does not form part of a body with multiple mandates.

It is also not part of the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman. The Ombudsman's office is a separate independent state body with a different mandate that relates to the protection of human rights with regard to the public sector.²⁰¹ The competences of the two bodies overlap with regard to the prohibition of discrimination in the public sector; however, the mandate of each is defined in separate laws. There are no legal provisions that would clarify the overlap. It is possible for an individual to lodge a complaint with both institutions as that is not precluded by any law. In such a situation, it would be possible to reach two different outcomes: the decision of the Advocate is binding but can be challenged before the Administrative Court, while the Ombudsman issues non-binding recommendations that cannot be challenged before the courts.

7.4 Status of the designated body – general independence and resources

a) Status of the body

- Separate or other legal status or personality

The Advocate of the Principle of Equality was set up as an independent state body (Article 19(1) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act). The body conducts its responsibilities autonomously within the framework and on the basis of the law and the Constitution (Article 19(2)). The chair of the Advocate has the status of a functionary, in line with Article 28(1) of the Act, as opposed to the previous situation in which the Advocate was one of the civil servants employed by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. The reassurance that the Advocate will no longer function as a one-person body (as it has been since it was first established in 2005) stems from a provision in Article 30, according to which the Advocate shall have a professional service which will carry out professional, administrative or other tasks.

- Selection of governing body

The Advocate is appointed for a five-year term, by the National Assembly, upon a proposal from the President of the Republic of Slovenia. A simple relative majority is needed in the vote by the National Assembly to elect the Advocate. The President of the Republic proposes a candidate for the post of the Advocate from among the candidates who were nominated or who applied. However, he or she may also propose other candidates. The President submits a reasoned proposal for the candidate to the National Assembly (Article 25 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act).

²⁰⁰ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, written response to questions sent by email to the author on 5 March 2018.

²⁰¹ The Ombudsman has a mandate to oversee respect for all constitutional rights, including the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of national origin, race, gender, language, religion, political or other beliefs, financial status, birth, education, social status, disability or any other personal characteristic (Article 14 of the Constitution).

- Sources of funding

The funds for the work of the defender are provided from the budget of the Republic of Slovenia and are determined by the National Assembly. (Article 31 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act). The budget will be fixed by the Republic of Slovenia budget implementation acts for each separate budget period.

- Powers to recruit and manage staff

As an independent state body, the Advocate has the power to independently recruit and manage staff in line with the allocated budget. Once recruited, the staff are accountable to the Advocate in the person of the functionary who is responsible for heading the Advocate as an equality body.

- Accountability

The Advocate must report to the National Assembly by submitting regular annual or special reports on its work and findings on the existence of discrimination against various groups with certain personal characteristics. The National Assembly may adopt opinions and recommendations on the Advocate's reports. The Government may provide a preliminary opinion on the reports (Article 22 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act).²⁰²

The Advocate may be dismissed early, before the expiry of the mandate, only if he or she: files a request to stand down; no longer meets the conditions for performing his or her function; permanently loses his or her ability to perform the function; or is found responsible for violating the law or the Constitution which disables the lawful or autonomous performance of the function in line with this Act.

The dismissal procedure begins upon a proposal from the President of the Republic (Article 28(3) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act).

The fact that the previous Advocate of the Principle of Equality lacked 'the organisational and budgetary independence required of a body for the promotion of equal treatment' was also confirmed by the 2014 ECRI report.²⁰³ ECRI recommended that the state find a suitable solution 'in order for a fully independent national specialised body to combat discrimination' to be established.²⁰⁴ In its 2017 report, following the reform of the equality body, ECRI declared that its recommendation has been implemented.²⁰⁵

b) Independence of the body

A specific provision of the law is dedicated solely to the autonomous status of the Advocate. Specifically, according to Article 20 of the 2016 Protection Against Discrimination Act, the Advocate may not be given binding guidelines related to the content of its work, particularly in relation to:

- the content of the published studies and research reports in the field of discrimination and decisions on which areas and groups with a certain personal characteristic will be researched;

²⁰² The fact that no annual reports were issued by the Advocate between 2012 and 2016 was the result of a protest by the previous Advocate, who wanted to expose the untenable situation of there being a single person acting as the equality body for all grounds and all fields of competence.

²⁰³ ECRI (2014) *Report on Slovenia*, 2014, available at: www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/slovenia/SVN-CbC-IV-2014-038-ENG.pdf.

²⁰⁴ ECRI (2014) *Report on Slovenia*, 2014, available at: www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/slovenia/SVN-CbC-IV-2014-038-ENG.pdf.

²⁰⁵ ECRI (2017), *Conclusions on the implementation of the recommendations in respect of Slovenia*, <https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Slovenia/SVN-IFU-IV-2017-039-ENG.pdf>.

- recommendations that the Advocate issues in relation to discrimination findings to state bodies, local communities and bearers of public authority or other subjects in line with the Act;
- the content of reports published by the Advocate on discrimination findings;
- decisions of the Advocate based on the Act;
- decisions on whether the Advocate will take part in a judicial procedure in a specific case, as provided for by the Act.

In order to enhance the independence of the Advocate or eliminate the risk of bias, the law explicitly states which functions are incompatible with the function of the Advocate (Article 29 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act).

Based on all provisions and facts, the Advocate may be considered as an independent state body in practice.

c) Resources

- The annual budget of the body: Initially, the budget allocated to the body was EUR 130 000 for 2017, which was insufficient. Following the visit of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the Ministry of Finance agreed to add an additional EUR 50 000 for 2017 to enable the equality body to relocate. The 2018 budget was further increased to EUR 500 000, rising to EUR 1 462 709 in 2022.²⁰⁶
- The total number of staff of the body: as of 31 December 2022, 27 civil servants were employed by the Advocate in addition to the head of the Advocate.²⁰⁷ This is a significant increase in the number of staff compared with the eight staff members who were employed as at 31 December 2017.

7.5 Grounds covered by the designated body

The Advocate of the Principle of Equality covers the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, language, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, social standing, economic situation, education or any other personal characteristic. Based on the variety of different cases published on the Advocate's website covering all discrimination grounds, it can be assessed that each ground receives appropriate attention.²⁰⁸

Attention given to the individual grounds depends on the number of complaints received by the Advocate in relation to each ground. In addition, the Advocate monitors the situation through complaints received by the Ombudsman, inspectorates and the police, and through court case law. The Advocate also follows developments in society and conducts structured dialogue both with state bodies and NGOs.²⁰⁹ In general, there is no evidence available to conclude that certain grounds would be given priority or that others would be neglected. So far, the Advocate has not prioritised any ground over other grounds. The information available on the grounds dealt with by the Advocate consists of the statistics on the complaints received, presented by ground, the content of the Advocate's website and the content of the annual report.

²⁰⁶ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 20, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²⁰⁷ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 20, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²⁰⁸ See: <http://www.zagovornik.si/obravnavani-primeri/obravnavani-primeri-rezultati/>.

²⁰⁹ Advocate of the Principle of Equality, written response to questions sent by email to the author on 5 March 2018.

7.6 Competences of the designated body – and their independent exercise

a) Independent assistance to victims

In Slovenia, the designated body has the competence to provide independent assistance to victims.

According to Article 21, the Advocate provides independent assistance to victims of discrimination in claiming their rights in relation to protection from discrimination, in the sense of providing advice and legal aid to parties in other administrative and judicial procedures related to discrimination. Legal assistance is provided by the Advocate's staff, some of whom are lawyers, while others have a social sciences or public administration background. The assistance provided in practice is independent. The staff employed by the Advocate do not take instructions from anyone outside the body, and no one is entitled to provide such instructions to the Advocate. Assistance to victims is therefore not exercised by a third party. The assistance is provided effectively. The victims can access the Advocate through phone, email, in writing or personally. The office hours for victims are every day from 10:00 to 12:00, and on Wednesdays from 15:00 to 18:00. The phone line is free of charge.

b) Independent surveys and reports

In Slovenia, the designated body has the competence to conduct independent surveys and publish independent reports.

According to Article 21, the Advocate conducts independent research on the situation of people with a certain personal characteristic, in particular gender, ethnicity, race, ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation, and other issues related to discrimination against people with a certain personal characteristic. The same article provides that the Advocate will publish independent reports and issue recommendations to state bodies, local communities, bearers of public authority, employers, companies and other subjects in relation to findings about the situation of people with a certain personal characteristic, with the aim of preventing or eliminating discrimination and in relation to the adoption of special measures for the elimination of discrimination.

This mandate has only been given to the Advocate with the adoption of the 2016 Protection Against Discrimination Act. In 2017, the Advocate published the outcomes of a survey of perceptions of the scope of discrimination in Slovenia.²¹⁰ In 2019, the Advocate published research analysis on good practices in diversity management.²¹¹ In 2020, the Advocate published a report on intersex persons and a report on access for persons with HIV to insurance services. In 2021, it published a report on students with hearing impairments in education and a report on trans persons in respect of the legal and medical procedure for gender confirmation. In 2022, it published a special report on the accessibility of secondary schools to persons with reduced mobility.²¹²

In accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, the Advocate adopts an annual work plan. Neither the Rules nor the Advocate's annual reports mention strategic planning in terms of a multi-annual programme setting its priorities or individual strategies for specific aspects of its mandate.

²¹⁰ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2018), *Annual Report for 2017 (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2017)*, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/redno-letno-porocilo-za-leto-2017/>.

²¹¹ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2019), *Research on good practices of diversity management and facilitating equality in small and medium enterprises in Slovenia (Raziskava dobrih praks upravljanja raznolikosti in spodbujanja enakosti v malih in srednjih podjetjih v Sloveniji)*, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Dobre-prakse-raznolikost-in-enakost-v-MSP-2019.pdf>.

²¹² The special reports are available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/posebna-porocila/>, while the information on the surveys is available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/raziskave-o-diskriminaciji/>.

c) Recommendations

In Slovenia, the designated body has the competence to issue independent recommendations on discrimination issues.

According to Article 21 of the PADA, the Advocate has the power to propose the adoption of special measures to improve the situation of people who are in a less favourable situation due to a certain personal characteristic.

In 2022, the Advocate issued:

- 45 recommendations regarding proposed laws (prevention of discrimination);
- 10 recommendations directed at existing laws and regulations (elimination of discrimination);
- 25 recommendations aimed at the promotion of equal treatment (prevention of discrimination).²¹³

These independent recommendations were to a variety of stakeholders: the National Assembly, the Government, the ministries and the municipalities.

In its annual reports, the Advocate monitors the status of the recommendations – from fully taken into account to disregarded. In 2022, of 81 recommendations, 21 were taken into account and 53 were not taken into account.²¹⁴

d) Prevention, promotion and awareness-raising

Article 21 of the PADA states that the Advocate's role includes raising awareness among the general public about discrimination and measures for its prevention and elimination. The Advocate's task of raising awareness is carried out by publishing independent reports and other information on the official website and on social networks, publishing leaflets, conducting field visits and trade fair events, appearing in the media, etc.

In 2022, the Advocate's staff members attended 22 educational events with their contributions and lectures for various expert stakeholders. The Advocate engaged in public awareness-raising by attending over 40 events. The Advocate is also conducting awareness-raising by using its own materials, such as annual reports, special reports and leaflets with basic information. In March 2021, the Advocate, in cooperation with the Municipality of Ljubljana, organised a special exhibition under the framework of the Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Week for Combating Racial Discrimination. The exhibition, entitled 'Advocates of the Principle of Equality', promoted ambassadors of equality, equal treatment and equal opportunities, each representing one of the personal grounds.²¹⁵ In 2022, the Advocate organised five different events aimed at specific audiences.²¹⁶

In line with Article 15 of the PADA, the Advocate cooperates with non-governmental organisations, social partners and other civil society organisations working in the field of equal treatment; the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms; the protection of vulnerable people against discrimination; and the provision of legal, social and other assistance to persons discriminated against in order to formulate solutions and proposals to achieve the purpose of the Act. In 2021, the Advocate maintained cooperation with civil society organisations; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the cooperation

²¹³ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 121, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²¹⁴ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, pp. 121-137, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²¹⁵ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2022), *Annual Report for 2021 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2021 – 1. del)*, pp. 136-146, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²¹⁶ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 164, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

took place in written form. However, the Advocate carried out six (in-person) meetings at the initiative of representatives of civil society (personal grounds considered: gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, gender expression, disability and health).²¹⁷ In 2022, the Advocate actively cooperated with at least 90 civil society organisations. The cooperation took place in the form of Advocate's inquiries for the purposes of research, analysis and special reports; Advocate's replies to enquiries from civil society organisations; meeting with CSOs; information, awareness-raising and education activities; and letters of support to CSO projects.²¹⁸

e) Other competences

Article 21 of the PADA also states that the Advocate:

- undertakes control of the respect of the law on the basis of the competences defined in Chapter 5 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act and other acts which may define its competences (this means that the Advocate carries out assessment procedures and also inspection procedures);
- monitors the general situation in Slovenia in the field of protection from discrimination and the situation of people with certain personal characteristics;²¹⁹
- ensures the exchange of available information with European Union bodies.

7.7 Legal standing of the designated body

In Slovenia, the designated body has legal standing to bring discrimination complaints (on the behalf of both identified and non-identified victim(s)) and to intervene in legal cases concerning discrimination, in accordance with the conditions defined by law. It also has legal standing to bring discrimination complaints *ex officio* to the Constitutional Court.

Article 41(1) of the Protection Against Discrimination Act states that, without prejudice to the provisions of the Civil Procedure Act, an individual who has experienced discrimination may authorise the Advocate to represent him or her in judicial proceedings under Article 39 of the Act. In the name of the Advocate, the procedural acts may be performed only by a person who is employed with the Advocate and who has passed the state legal exam (Article 41(1)). This rule is stricter than the general rules for representation in civil procedures. Namely, under the general rules, representatives of state bodies or legal persons do not have to have passed the state legal exam to represent complainants in disputes below the value of EUR 20 000.

Here, two possible interpretations could arise. According to the first interpretation, this law is specific to the general rules and should also be used for minor disputes in line with the principle of *lex specialis derogat legi generali*, while under the second interpretation, this makes no sense as it would put discrimination victims in a worse situation in comparison with other complainants, and employees of the Advocate in a worse position than employees in other state bodies who take part in court proceedings, which would make victims' access to justice more difficult. Since the general provisions of the Civil Procedure Act are more lenient for the victims of discrimination and their authorised representatives, the courts, in the opinion of the author, should also apply those provisions.

With regard to intervening in legal procedures, the same rules apply to the Advocate as to any other legal or natural person who is interested in intervening as a third party in a legal proceeding before the civil court. It is up to the court to allow intervention by such a third

²¹⁷ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2022), *Annual Report for 2021 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2021 – 1. del)*, pp. 151-154, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²¹⁸ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 177, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²¹⁹ Any personal ground could be taken that is either stated in PADA or the Constitution or elsewhere, or a ground that the Advocate would consider falls in the realm of 'personal grounds'.

party in each particular case. The courts have the discretionary power to allow intervention by a third party.

In 2019, the Advocate brought its first case to court by representing a claimant in an age discrimination case. The case concerns a sports referee. According to the relevant provision of the statute of the association which grants licences to referees, his active career automatically ended on 31 December of the year when he reached the age of 70. The claimant, represented by the Advocate, demanded the termination of the discrimination, compensation and publication of the judgment in the media. The court found discrimination, awarded compensation for the claimant in the amount of EUR 2 000, and ordered the respondent to publish the judgment in the media at its own expense. Both the applicant and the association have appealed the respective decisions. In 2022, the Court of Appeal dismissed both appeals and upheld the judgment of the court of first instance.

7.8 Dispute resolution

a) Quasi-judicial functions

In Slovenia, the body is a quasi-judicial institution.

The body can issue binding enforceable decisions. It can issue non-binding opinions.

With the Protection Against Discrimination Act, the Advocate obtained some additional powers, and the position of the complainant is now clearer. Namely, the Advocate shall be able to conduct investigative procedures, and it shall have investigative powers and the powers to demand information from the opposing party, in order to objectively determine facts and draw conclusions in each case. The complainants have the status of a party to the procedure, which means that they have the right to see the case files and the statements of the opposing party (except for personal data that needs to be protected in line with the Protection of Personal Data Act).

With regard to decision-making powers, the Advocate exercises its powers only in part: inspection procedures are not yet carried out, while the administrative procedures on establishing discrimination are. The reason for this relates to the problem with the procedure as it is defined in the Protection Against Discrimination Act. The Act suggests that the Advocate should first conduct an administrative procedure in order to examine the discrimination complaint and then issue a decision following this procedure. If discrimination is found to have occurred through the administrative procedure, the Advocate carries out an inspection procedure and issues a second decision based on that procedure. Legal remedies can be used in respect of both final decisions issued in the two procedures. Hence, the law foresees two procedures conducted by one body in one single case of discrimination. As the procedure is unclear, the Advocate conducts only administrative procedures on establishing discrimination, and not inspection procedures.

i) Power to impose sanctions

The Advocate does not have the power to impose sanctions. The PADA does not confer any minor offence-finding powers on the Advocate. However, the Advocate does carry out proceedings for establishing discrimination on the basis of the general administrative procedure rules. There are different ways for the Advocate to conclude cases of alleged discrimination. In obvious cases of discrimination, such as openly discriminatory advertisements for rented housing, the Advocate shall call on the responsible party to remedy the violation. When the responsible party complies with the Advocate's request to stop the discriminatory treatment, the matter is resolved informally, ending with an official note of the conclusion (without the Advocate issuing a decision). The Advocate may also close cases with an official note where counselling is considered as a more appropriate

response and therefore reclassifies the case as counselling.²²⁰ Where these other manners of concluding a case are not applicable, the Advocate issues a declaratory decision on whether or not discrimination has taken place. Pursuant to Article 43 of the PADA, the Advocate prepares a proposal to initiate a minor offence procedure in accordance with the Act regulating minor offences and sends it to the competent inspection authority for further consideration. The competent inspection authority must examine the case and inform the Advocate of its decision. Sanctions can be imposed by the inspection authorities.

ii) Nature and level of sanctions that can be imposed

The Advocate cannot impose any sanctions. However, the Advocate can refer a case to the competent inspectorate, which can impose sanctions. Article 45 of the PADA prescribes fines for offenders who:

- subject a person to discrimination (Article 6 of the PADA),
- subject a person to harassment or sexual harassment (Article 8 of the PADA), -
- give instructions to discriminate (Article 9 of the PADA),
- victimise a person helping the person discriminated against (Article 11 of the PADA).

Legal entities, an individual entrepreneur or individuals who autonomously pursues an activity may be fined from EUR 3 000 to EUR 30 000. Natural persons may be fined from EUR 250 to EUR 3 000. (5) The responsible person of the state authority or of the self-governing community and the responsible person of the legal entity may be fined from EUR 250 to EUR 5 000.

iii) Possibility to appeal

There is no possibility to appeal against a decision of the Advocate; however, there is a possibility to initiate an administrative dispute before the Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia at its registered office in Ljubljana. The dispute does not have the effect of suspending the decision of the Advocate.

iv) Enforcement of binding decisions

The PADA does not stipulate any enforcement rules for the Advocate's declaratory decisions. Pursuant to Article 43 of the PADA, if the Advocate considers that the prohibition of discrimination has been violated, the Advocate initiates a minor offence proceeding with the competent inspectorate for further consideration. The competent inspectorate must consider the case and inform the Advocate of its decision.

v) Implementation of non-binding opinions

In accordance with Article 21 of the PADA, the Advocate can also give non-binding opinions regarding the established situation of persons with a certain personal circumstance, relating to the prevention and elimination of discrimination and the adoption of specific and other measures to eliminate discrimination. These can be in the form of recommendations to employers, economic operators and other entities in individual cases. This power of the Advocate is regulated by the PADA, together with policy recommendations as described under point 7.6 above, meaning that the law does not distinguish between the two. In non-binding opinions, the Advocate makes a recommendation to the responsible party and requests that they inform the Advocate of measures taken. At the same time, the Advocate warns that if the responsible party does not comply with its request and if violations continue, the Advocate will initiate a procedure of establishing the existence of discrimination in accordance with the PADA. The Advocate also publishes the status of these recommendations in its annual reports. In 2022, the Advocate issued one such

²²⁰ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 60, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

recommendation to eliminate unequal treatment in an individual case.²²¹ The Advocate in this case recommended that the real estate portal inform the user who posted the disputed advertisement that it is not allowed to offer real estate on the market in a way that in any way restricts or excludes individuals from accessing housing on account of their personal circumstances (i.e. non-EU nationals in that specific case). The Advocate also recommended that the portal amend the terms and conditions of use of the website and prohibit the publication of advertisements that constitute discrimination. The recommendation has been respected.

b) Amicable settlements

The Rules of Procedure of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality stipulate that where possible, the Advocate will work throughout the proceedings to resolve the case amicably by means of a settlement. Upon reaching a settlement, the proceedings are terminated. However, the settlement reached does not prevent the Advocate from accepting its own findings and proposals and address them accordingly in accordance with the law (Article 20 of the Rules).²²²

In 2022, the Advocate did not report on any individual cases that concluded with its contribution to an amicable settlement.²²³

7.9 Procedural safeguards

The Rules of Procedure of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality stipulate that the Advocate's Expert Service conducts discrimination and inspection proceedings; prepares reports, drafts letters, decisions, recommendations and opinions in matters within the Advocate's competence; advises and provides legal assistance to parties in other administrative and judicial proceedings relating to discrimination and the prevention and elimination of discrimination; participates in court proceedings on discrimination in accordance with the law; and carries out independent research and performs other tasks as ordered by the Advocate (Article 11 of the Rules). The Expert service is divided into departments: the Office of the Advocate; the Systemic Monitoring, Awareness Raising and Prevention Department; the Discrimination, Counselling and Advocacy Department; and the Inspection Department. Each case is assigned to a civil servant in the Expert Service who then proposes the tasks to be carried out in the case. Although the Rules stipulate that the head of the body determines the division of work between the department, it seems that the tasks of carrying out discrimination proceedings, preparing decisions, advising and providing legal assistance to parties and participation in court proceedings are all performed by the Discrimination, Counselling and Advocacy Department. No particular rules on separation between these capacities were identified.

7.10 Data collection by the designated body

a) Registration of complaints and decisions

In Slovenia, the body registers the number of complaints of discrimination and the decisions that are made, as well as the number of requests for assistance from persons who allege that they have been discriminated against (by ground, field, type of discrimination, etc.). These data are available to the public. The statistical report on the

²²¹ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 121, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²²² The exact role of the Advocate regarding amicable settlements is not clear, as no details are provided in the legislation or in publicly accessible documents.

²²³ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2021 – 1. del)*, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

work of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality shows that in 2022, the Advocate dealt with 410 cases, 328 of which were closed and 82 of which were rolled over to 2023.²²⁴

The statistical report on the work of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality shows that in 2022, the Advocate dealt with 410 cases, 328 of which were closed in 2022 and 82 of which continued into 2023.²²⁵ In 2022, the Advocate received 315 new cases, while it was still dealing with 95 on-going cases that were transferred to 2022 from previous years.²²⁶ These cases comprise both discrimination complaints and requests for assistance by victims of alleged discrimination. In 27.5 % of closed cases, the complainants did not state the personal ground, hence the case was not identified as a discrimination case (they were cases in which the complainant believed that the matter related to discrimination). Of 328 closed cases, 11.6 % referred to disability; 2.5 % to race or ethnicity; 6.5 % to age; 6.2 % to gender; 4.2 % to religion or belief; and 2.8 % to sexual orientation. In respect of fields of discrimination, 20.1 % of closed cases referred to access to goods and services; 23.1 % to employment conditions; 6.5 % to access to employment; 7.2 % to education; 13.3 % to social protection, including healthcare; 5.5 % to social benefits; 0.3 % to membership of workers' or employers' organisations; and 0.6 % to access to vocational training.²²⁷

In addition, the Advocate dealt with 34 cases in which it assessed whether or not an act was discriminatory, in order to decide whether to submit it for constitutional review. In 2022, the Advocate did not initiate any constitutional reviews before the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia.

b) Equality data collection

In Slovenia, the designated body collects general equality data.

Within the tasks and powers under the PADA, the Advocate monitors the overall situation in the Republic of Slovenia with regard to the protection against discrimination and position of persons with particular personal grounds (sixth indent of Article 21 of PADA). Article 16 of the PADA also explicitly requires the Advocate and the competent inspectorates (the minor offence authorities that are competent in different fields in which discrimination has occurred) to collect anonymised data on the number of discrimination cases that were considered by the inspectorate, classified according to individual personal grounds, forms of discrimination and individual subject areas. The inspection services are required to annually introduce the data to the Advocate. The data is collected and used for the purposes of monitoring, planning and managing the non-discriminatory policy and for scientific and research purposes.

In this context, the Advocate submits a request annually to the competent authorities for information on reported cases of discrimination, accordingly classified by individual personal grounds, forms of discrimination and individual areas of life. Besides the inspection services, the Advocate also submits the request to the Police, the Office of the State Prosecutor-General and all courts. The data received is then presented in the Advocate's annual report.²²⁸

Pursuant to Article 21(1) of the PADA, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality has the task and the power to conduct independent research aimed at determining the situation of

²²⁴ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2021), *Annual Report for 2020 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2020 – 1. del)*, p. 40.

²²⁵ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 42, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²²⁶ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 42, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²²⁷ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 45, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²²⁸ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2022), *Annual Report for 2021 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2021 – 1. del)*, pp. 82-103, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

persons with a particular personal circumstance. Any type of analytical or research work on discrimination results in equality data. The Advocate carries out its research activities and the related monitoring of the general situation in the field of protection against discrimination in the country (Article 21(6) of the PADA) at three levels of complexity:

- At the level of special reports, where the aim is to shed light on the state of a particular social phenomenon in the area of protection against discrimination;
- At the level of research, where the aim is to gain a more complex insight into a particular social problem (e.g. public attitudes towards social groups with a particular personal circumstance) by means of scientific tools.
- At the level of analysis, when it analyses and identifies key features of a smaller or more specific issue related to discrimination.²²⁹

In 2022, the Advocate carried out six independent surveys, namely:

- Analysis of the conditions and criteria for the allocation of non-profit housing,
- Analysis of the experiences of different religious communities in society,
- Public Opinion Survey on Discrimination in Slovenia in 2022.

Three qualitative research studies with focus groups on the following topics:

- Roma inclusion in education,
- Roma inclusion in employment,
- Access to a personal doctor.

However, the Advocate continuously draws attention to the challenge of insufficient data collection on equality, equal treatment and equal opportunities, as Slovenia is lagging behind in this respect compared with other EU Member States.²³⁰

7.11 Roma and Travellers

Responsibility for the Roma generally falls within the competence of the Government Office for National Minorities. However, the Advocate is carrying out dialogue with Roma civil society organisations, investigating cases relating to alleged discrimination against Roma people and focusing on the Roma within its systemic work.

²²⁹ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 145, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

²³⁰ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2023), *Annual Report for 2022 – Part I (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2022 – 1. del)*, p. 146, available at: <http://www.zagovornik.si/porocila/>.

8 IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

8.1 Dissemination of information, dialogue with NGOs and between social partners

- a) Dissemination of information about legal protection against discrimination (Article 10 Directive 2000/43 and Article 12 Directive 2000/78)

Pursuant to Article 154 of the Constitution, regulations must be published prior to their coming into force. State regulations are published in the *State Official Journal*, whereas local community regulations are published in an official publication as determined by the local community. The Advocate disseminates specific non-discrimination related content from its work via its website www.zagovornik-rs.si, social media channels (Facebook and Twitter), in public events and through media announcements.

- b) Measures to encourage dialogue with NGOs with a view to promoting the principle of equal treatment (Article 12 Directive 2000/43 and Article 14 Directive 2000/78)

Under Article 15 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, in designing solutions and proposals aimed at achieving the purpose of the Act, the Government and other state bodies have to cooperate with NGOs (associations, foundations or institutes). The annual report of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality for 2021 provides information on the dialogue led with NGOs.²³¹

- c) Measures to promote dialogue between social partners to give effect to the principle of equal treatment within workplace practices, codes of practice and workforce monitoring (Article 11 Directive 2000/43 and Article 13 Directive 2000/78)

Under Article 15 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, in designing solutions and proposals aimed at achieving the purpose of the Act, the Government and other state bodies have to cooperate with social partners who are active in the field of equal treatment; the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms; the protection of vulnerable groups from discrimination; or the provision of legal or social assistance to persons who experience discrimination. Trade unions provide legal assistance to victims of discrimination at work when they are enforcing their rights before the courts and other state bodies.

- d) Addressing the situation of Roma and Travellers

The situation of the Roma is addressed by the Advocate of the Principle of Equality. Competence for the situation of the Roma also lies with the Government Office for National Minorities (which deals with the position of Italian and Hungarian minorities in addition to the Roma ethnic community).

8.2 Measures to ensure compliance with the principle of equal treatment (Article 14 Directive 2000/43, Article 16 Directive 2000/78)

- a) Compliance of national legislation (Articles 14(a) and 16(a))

In Slovenia, there is no explicit provision stating that any laws, regulations or administrative provisions contrary to the principle of equal treatment shall be abolished.

The Protection Against Discrimination Act contains more general provisions, such that state bodies, local authorities and holders of public authority must adopt measures in their areas

²³¹ Advocate of the Principle of Equality (2022), *Annual Report for 2021 – Part II (Redno letno poročilo za leto 2021 – 2. del)*.

of competence to ensure equal treatment, including measures of a regulatory or political nature (Article 14).

Under the Slovenian Constitution, all laws, regulations and rules must comply with the Constitution (Article 153). Therefore, it would be unconstitutional for any of them to contradict the principle of equality, which is embodied in the Constitution. One of the basic powers of the Constitutional Court is to decide on the compliance of legislation and other regulations. The Constitutional Court Act contains a special chapter on the assessment of the constitutionality and legality of regulations and general laws passed for the exercise of public authority. This chapter stipulates the legal consequences of a decision. Under Article 43, the Constitutional Court may completely or partly revoke a law which does not conform to the Constitution. Article 44 stipulates that a law revoked by the Constitutional Court shall not apply in situations that occurred before the date when such a decision came into effect, if there have been no legal rulings on such situations by that date. Unconstitutional and illegal non-statutory regulations and general acts issued for the exercise of public authority should be revoked by the Constitutional Court. Such acts or regulations are to be repealed by the Constitutional Court if it discovers harmful consequences arising from their unconstitutionality.

This repeal is retroactive (Article 45). If the Constitutional Court, under Article 48, determines that a law, other regulation or general act for the exercise of public authority is unconstitutional or illegal because a certain matter which it should have regulated was not regulated or has been regulated in a manner which cannot be amended or abolished, an assessment will be made and a decision adopted. The legislature or body which issued the unconstitutional or illegal regulation or general act must ensure that the unconstitutionality or illegality is eliminated within the time limit set by the Constitutional Court.

b) Compliance of other rules/clauses (Articles 14(b) and 16(b))

In Slovenia, the provisions of Article 14(b) of Directive 2000/43 and Article 16(b) of Directive 2000/78 are implemented by Article 2 of the Protection Against Discrimination Act, which states that 'the act shall bind state authorities, local communities, holders of public authority, legal entities and natural persons to ensure protection against discrimination or equal treatment of all persons in all fields of decision making, legal transactions and other operations or conduct,' particularly in regard to the fields listed in Directives 2000/43 and 2000/78.

Furthermore, Article 1 of the PADA states that equal treatment shall be guaranteed in various fields of social life, when enforcing human rights and fundamental freedoms, in exercising rights and obligations and in other legal relationships in political, economic, social, cultural, civil or other fields.

These provisions show that contracts are covered by civil law, that collective agreements are considered law, and that the internal rules of business and any other kind of internal rules are covered by the field of economy and by the notion of 'other fields', which is explicitly mentioned in the legislation. Although the PADA offers very wide protection, it does not stipulate how such clauses or rules should be approached if they violate the principle of equality. Under the general legal provisions, they should be disregarded when the law is applied.

9 COORDINATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

The Protection Against Discrimination Act no longer contains provisions on who is responsible for coordinating issues, laws, policies or practices regarding anti-discrimination in Slovenia. In practice, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities is considered to be responsible for coordinating policies in the field of equality. However, these coordination measures are weak and are rarely undertaken.

Previously, according to the Act Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment (Article 10) and the Act Amending the Public Administration Act, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities was responsible for coordinating issues regarding anti-discrimination.

There is no anti-racism or anti-discrimination national plan or a national plan on LGBTQI equality in Slovenia. There is an Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities (2022-2030).

The Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities (2022-2030) stipulates 13 goals with additional specific measures: awareness-raising and informing; living conditions and inclusion; accessibility; education; labour and employment; financial and social security; health and healthcare; cultural participation; sports and leisure activities; religious and spiritual life; self-organisation; violence and discrimination; and ageing. It is not clear if and how the Advocate and the civil society have been involved in the design of the Action Programme. The Advocate is not mentioned by the document in any role. Civil society organisations active in the field are listed as organisations that can report on the goals and measures from their perspective.

10 CURRENT BEST PRACTICES

The Advocate of the Principle of Equality, together with the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana (AGRFT), the Community of Municipalities of Slovenia (SOS) and the Prizma Foundation (a private non-profit organisation performing activities for the improvement of employment opportunities), began implementing the two-year project 'Let's face discrimination' (*Soočimo se z diskriminacijo*). During the two-year period from 2022 to 2024, the partners will conduct a survey on perceptions of discrimination and prepare various materials and artworks to raise awareness about discrimination. The aim is also to provide training on discrimination for local government officials who, as equality promoters, will put into practice appropriate ways of treating clients. The project is funded by the European Commission's Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values Programme.²³²

The Office for National Minorities is implementing the 'National Platform for Roma - SIFOROMA5' (Nacionalna platforma za Rome - SIFOROMA5). It is funded by the European Union Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and the Office for National Minorities. The aim of this project is to strengthen the consultation process in relation to the social inclusion of Roma by linking national and local decision makers, the Roma community and the non-governmental sector. The project is predominantly focused on developments at the local level.²³³

In order to raise awareness among the Slovenian legal profession and other stakeholders, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality published the Slovenian translation of the FRA *Handbook on European non-discrimination law – 2018*. The *Handbook* was originally published in English by the European Court of Human Rights and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. The *Handbook* had not previously been available in Slovenian.²³⁴

Association Legebitra, which specialises in the provision of support to LGBTIQ+ individuals, has begun the implementation of a project entitled 'From gap to access: transgender and intersex persons in health, 2021-2024' (*Od vrzeli do dostopa – transspolne in interpolne osebe v zdravstvu*). The goal of the project is to reduce discrimination against the groups concerned in the field of health services in Slovenia and Croatia through good practice, education and exchange with various stakeholders. The project is funded by the European Commission's Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values Programme.²³⁵

The Maribor Synagogue is implementing activities within the Krokus Project. Krokus is a yellow flower that symbolizes the Star of David that Jews were obliged to wear during Nazism. The project is aimed at raising awareness among young people above the age of 10. Children are invited to plant the flowers in memory of the Jewish children who died in the Holocaust. The project began in Ireland. In Slovenia, 84 schools are taking part in the activity during the school year 2021-22.²³⁶

²³² See website: <https://zagovornik.si/ob-dnevu-clovekovih-pravic-zagovornik-nacela-enakosti-s-partnerji-zacel-projekt-soocimo-se-z-diskriminacijo/>.

²³³ See website: <https://www.gov.si/zbirke/projekti-in-programi/krepitev-nacionalnega-posvetovalnega-procesa-nacionalna-platforma-za-rome-siforoma-3/>.

²³⁴ See: <https://www.zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Prirocnik-o-evropskem-protidiskriminacijskem-pravu.pdf>.

²³⁵ See project website: https://legebitra.si/k_legebitra/projekti-in-programi/.

²³⁶ See project website: <http://www.sinagogamaribor.si/slo/dediscina/projekt-krokus/>.

11 SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

11.1 Potential breaches of the directives at the national level

- There is no clear legal basis for persons with disabilities to be able to claim reasonable accommodation in employment. Reasonable accommodation rights in employment are not legally defined in respect of persons who do not have the official status of disability. This is problematic with regard to Article 5 of Directive 2000/78/EC.
- Apart from defining the exception relating to a genuine occupational requirement, the law does not include a complete prohibition of direct discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity beyond employment as required by Directive 2000/43/EC.
- The sanctions (fines for misdemeanours or minor offences) prescribed in a range from a maximum to a minimum are in fact prescribed only at the minimum end of the range. The Protection Against Discrimination Act does not contain explicit authorisation for the inspectorates to impose fines higher than the minimum, which means that, unless the law changes, legal persons will never have to pay more than EUR 3 000 in fines for discrimination, while natural persons will not need to pay more than EUR 250 or EUR 500, depending on the gravity and type of offence. This indicates that the fines cannot be regarded as effective and dissuasive (Article 17 of Directive 2000/78/EC; Article 15 of Directive 2000/43/EC).
- With the provisions on the standing of NGOs and the Advocate, which are now explicitly allowed to represent victims in judicial proceedings and act on their behalf, a new problem has emerged. Namely, the conditions for representation are now stricter for judicial cases of discrimination that are dealt with by county courts than for any other judicial case. According to the Civil Procedure Act, anyone with legal capacity may represent a party before the county courts, while according to the Protection Against Discrimination Act, an individual must have passed the state legal exam (bar exam) to represent a complainant. The conditions are therefore stricter for cases of discrimination, which makes access to justice more difficult. This is problematic with regard to Article 13(2) of Directive 2000/43/EC and might be in violation of the principle of equivalence.
- On a related matter, it is not clear whether the ceiling for compensation, which is set at EUR 5 000, is in place only for compensation that is claimed solely due to exposure to discrimination or for compensation in cases of discrimination in general. The verbatim interpretation supports the former position. If the former is true, the sanctions could not be considered dissuasive, as this would mean that compensation in cases of discrimination can never exceed EUR 5 000, even if the actual damages were much higher. This is problematic with regard to Articles 7(1) and 15 of Directive 2000/43/EC and 9(1) of Directive 2000/78/EC.
- National legislation provides an exception for employers with an ethos based on religion or belief under which the difference in treatment in the area of employment on the grounds of the religion or belief of the individual, in the case of occupational activities within churches and other public or private organisations, the ethos of which is based on religion or belief, does not constitute discrimination where, by reason of the nature of these activities or of the context in which they are carried out, a person's religion or belief constitutes a legitimate and justified occupational requirement, having regard to the organisation's ethos. However, the relevant provisions do not reflect the right of churches and other public or private organisations, the ethos of which is based on religion or belief, acting in conformity with national constitutions and laws, to require individuals working for them to act in good faith and with loyalty to the organisation's ethos. This is problematic with regard to Article 4(2) of Directive 2000/78/EC.

11.2 Other issues of concern

- It is not clear whether the Protection Against Discrimination Act provisions on remedies that can be claimed before courts in cases of discrimination (termination of the discrimination, compensation and publication of the judgment in the media) now apply in addition to the general tort law provisions or whether these provisions have replaced the general tort law rules.
- There is no national action plan or strategy concerning discrimination. The situation of the Roma, for which the Government Office for National Minorities is competent, is often not dealt with as a discrimination issue. Disability issues are entirely left to the Office for Persons with Disabilities within the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs.
- There is a lack of equality data, due to a strict interpretation of the Personal Data Protection Act.
- Data collection is an issue. The courts are not obliged to collect data on discrimination cases, and hence they have difficulties in reporting on such cases. The publicly accessible database www.sodnapraksa.si is not comprehensive; court cases that became final on the first instance (because they were not appealed) are not included in the database.
- Judicial interpretation is required as to whether situation testing is permitted by law and whether situation testing and statistical evidence are admissible as evidence in court.
- There is no common definition of 'intellectual disability'.
- The Social Care Act is discriminatory in the area of equal access to employment, since adults who obtain disability status under this Act have the right to receive social benefits, but it is automatically presumed that they are unable to live independently and are unable to be employed, regardless of their actual ability to work.
- Age limits for access to certain jobs could be in breach of EU law and CJEU case law.
- The Local Self-Government Act differentiates between autochthonous (indigenous) and non-autochthonous (non-indigenous) Roma. The Constitutional Court decided that this differentiation is reasonable and does not constitute discrimination (decision No. U-I-176/08-10 of 7 October 2010).
- Protection of individuals in cases of forced eviction is not in line with ECHR standards (e.g. *Winterstein v. France*), which require the provision of alternative accommodation in the event of forced eviction.
- No issues of concern can be identified regarding the use of artificial intelligence in relation to the implementation of the national legislation transposing the directives, or regarding the regulation of artificial intelligence. However, more data and research on the use of AI in Slovenia are needed.

12 LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN 2022

12.1 Legislative amendments

No new legislation in the field of anti-discrimination law was adopted in 2022.

12.2 Case law

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Sexual orientation

Name of the court: Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia

Date of decision: 16 June 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: U-I-91/21, Up-675/19

ECLI reference: ECLI:SI:USRS:2022:U.I.91.21

Link: <https://www.us-rs.si/odlocitev/?q=diskriminacija&caseId=&df=01.01.2022&dt=01.01.2023&af=&at=&vd=UP&vo=&vv=&vs=&ui=&va=&page=1&sort=&order=&id=117905>.

Brief summary: The Constitutional Court considered the constitutional complaint of a same-sex couple who had not succeeded in administrative procedures and before the courts in their claim to be placed on a list of potential candidates for joint adoption. The Marriage and Family Relations Act, the Family Code and the Civil Union Act, which regulate joint adoption, deny same-sex couples the possibility of joint adoption of children, while giving such a possibility to married (different-sex) couples and also to cohabiting (different-sex) partners. The Court stated that the Government has not demonstrated, by a blanket reference to the importance of the traditional family, that the absolute exclusion of same-sex partners from joint adoption would be an appropriate means of achieving the objective of protecting the interests of an adopted child. The illogic nature of concluding that, in order to protect the best interests of the child, same-sex partners should be excluded *a priori* from joint adoption is already indicated by the fact that Slovenian law already recognises and allows for joint legal parenthood between same-sex partners, precisely through the institution of unilateral stepchild adoption. The assessment of the best interests of the child can, by its nature, be made only in the context of a specific proceeding, where it will be assessed whether the partners (whether same-sex or different-sex) are indeed the most appropriate adoptive parents for the specific child. The Constitutional Court found that Articles 135 and 138 of the Marriage and Family Relations Act were incompatible with the right to non-discriminatory treatment of homosexually oriented persons under Article 14(1) in conjunction with Article 53(3) of the Constitution and Article 1 of Protocol No 12 to the ECHR, respectively, because they did not allow for joint adoption by partners of a registered same-sex partnership. Similarly, the first sentence of Article 2(3) of the Civil Union Act, which expressly prohibits joint adoption by partners in a civil partnership, is also incompatible with the prohibition of discriminatory treatment. The same applies to the first paragraph of Article 213 and Article 223 of the Family Code. In accordance with this decision of the Court, same-sex partners living in a formal civil partnership may henceforth jointly adopt a child under the same conditions as those applicable to different-sex spouses. The Court ordered that the National Assembly is obliged to eliminate the established inconsistency with the Constitution within six months after the publication of this decision in the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia*. Until the resolution of the identified inconsistency, the same rules apply to joint adoption by same-sex partners living in a civil partnership as apply to joint adoption by spouses under the current legislation.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Sexual orientation

Name of the court: Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia

Date of decision: 16 June 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: U-I-486/20, Up-572/18

ECLI reference: ECLI:SI:USRS:2022:U.I.486.20

Link: [https://www.us-](https://www.us-rs.si/odlocitev/?q=diskriminacija&caseId=&df=01.01.2022&dt=01.01.2023&af=&at=&vd=UP&vo=&vv=&vs=&ui=&va=&page=1&sort=&order=&id=117906)

[rs.si/odlocitev/?q=diskriminacija&caseId=&df=01.01.2022&dt=01.01.2023&af=&at=&vd=UP&vo=&vv=&vs=&ui=&va=&page=1&sort=&order=&id=117906](https://www.us-rs.si/odlocitev/?q=diskriminacija&caseId=&df=01.01.2022&dt=01.01.2023&af=&at=&vd=UP&vo=&vv=&vs=&ui=&va=&page=1&sort=&order=&id=117906).

Brief summary: The Constitutional Court considered the constitutional complaint of a same-sex couple who had not succeeded in administrative procedures and before the courts in their claim to conclude marriage. Article 3(1) of the Marriage and Family Relations Act provided that marriage was the union of husband and wife. Article 16 of the same Act provided that, in order for a marriage to be concluded, it was necessary for the persons concluding the marriage to be of different sexes. Article 3(1) of the Family Code states that a marriage is a union of a husband and wife. The Court stated the contested regulation, under which same-sex partners cannot marry, falls within the scope of the right to marry under Article 53 of the Constitution. However, in regulating marriage, the legislator must, in addition to the requirements of Article 53 of the Constitution, have regard to the prohibition of discrimination laid down in Article 14(1) of the Constitution and to the argument of human dignity, which is the foundation of human rights. The Court therefore focused on the assessment of whether the contested regulation complies with Article 14(1) of the Constitution, the Constitutional Court must, in addition to examining whether the contested regulation falls within the scope of any of the human rights and fundamental freedoms, also examine whether there is a difference in treatment between the person affected and the person to whom he or she is being compared. The Court found that under the contested regulation, same-sex and different-sex partners are treated differently. In order to formally confirm the existence of their relationship, different-sex partners have the option of marriage, while same-sex partners have the option of civil partnership. These are two legal institutions which differ both in their names and in their consequences. The Court found that the contested difference in treatment is thus based solely on the circumstance of sexual orientation, which constitutes a personal circumstance under Article 14(1) of the Constitution. Accordingly, the contested regulation infringes the right to non-discriminatory treatment of same-sex partners under Article 14(1) in conjunction with Article 53 of the Constitution. The Court stated that referencing to the traditional and majority conception of marriage in the Republic of Slovenia cannot constitute a constitutionally permissible objective for a legal regulation which prevents homosexuals from entering into marriage. The exercise of a human right or fundamental freedom of homosexual persons should not be conditional on the majority of the population supporting it. The Court ordered that the National Assembly is obliged to eliminate the established inconsistency with the Constitution within six months after the publication of this decision in the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia*. Until the resolution of the identified inconsistency, it is considered that marriage is a union of two persons.²³⁷

²³⁷ The amendment to the Family Code that implemented the decision of the Constitutional Court was adopted on 18 October 2022.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Age, Disability

Name of the court: Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia

Date of decision: 10 November 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: U-I-101/18, Up-276/18

ECLI reference: ECLI:SI:USRS:2022:U.I.101.18

Link: [https://www.us-](https://www.us-rs.si/odlocitev/?q=diskriminacija&caseId=&df=01.01.2022&dt=01.01.2023&af=&at=&vd=UP&vo=&vv=&vs=&ui=&va=&page=1&sort=&order=&id=118516)

[rs.si/odlocitev/?q=diskriminacija&caseId=&df=01.01.2022&dt=01.01.2023&af=&at=&vd=UP&vo=&vv=&vs=&ui=&va=&page=1&sort=&order=&id=118516](https://www.us-rs.si/odlocitev/?q=diskriminacija&caseId=&df=01.01.2022&dt=01.01.2023&af=&at=&vd=UP&vo=&vv=&vs=&ui=&va=&page=1&sort=&order=&id=118516)

Brief summary: The Constitutional Court considered the constitutional complaint concerning Article 12 of the Act Regulating Measures Relating to Salaries and Other Labour Costs for 2016 and other Measures in the Public Sector and Article 10 of the Act Regulating Measures Relating to Salaries and Other Labour Costs for 2017 so far as they relate to the determination of the amount of annual leave based on disability and on age over 50 years under the State Employees Act. The claimant contested these provisions, because in 2016 and 2017, the number of days of annual leave in the public sector was limited to 35 days. Instead of the 42 days of annual leave (including five days for disability and five days for those over 50 years of age) to which she would otherwise have been entitled, she was granted only 35 days of annual leave. The complainant submits that the contested regulation affected only elderly and disabled persons, who should have been granted additional leave as a measure of positive discrimination. The complainant also pointed out that the legislator had allowed additional days of annual leave to be granted to employees who worked in special conditions, but had not provided for such an exception to the general limitation in the case of elderly persons and persons with disabilities. The Constitutional Court found that the right to paid annual leave as a human right is enshrined in several international instruments that are binding the Republic of Slovenia, and therefore it must also be recognised as a human right by the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia. The contested regulation, which implies a limitation on the annual number of days of leave, thus relates to the exercise of the human right to annual leave. The Court found that the contested regulation on the maximum number of days of annual leave affected only those civil servants who were subject to the State Employees Act, who were persons of a certain age and/or who were persons with disability within the meaning of Article 14(1) of the Constitution. This means that the contested regulation, as regards the exercise of the human right to paid annual leave, resulted in less favourable treatment of civil servants with personal circumstances as referred to in Article 14(1) of the Constitution and, consequently, in an interference with the right to non-discriminatory treatment under that provision of the Constitution. The Court found that the disputed interference was not constitutionally permissible and that the contested provisions are inconsistent with the Constitution.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Disability

Name of the court: Advocate of the Principle of Equality

Date of decision: 31 January 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: 050-28/2020/24

ECLI reference: N/A

Link: <https://zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Ocena-diskriminatornosti-petega-odstavka-100.-clena-Zakona-o-pokojninskem-in-invalidskem-zavarovanju-ZPIZ-2.pdf>

Brief summary: The Advocate of the Principle of Equality received a petition for an assessment of the discriminatory nature of the regulation of the right to the assistance and attendance allowance under the Pension and Disability Insurance Act. The allowance is granted only to blind and partially sighted children and adolescents up to the age of 18. However, children with disabilities, who also depend on others to help them with most or all of their basic needs and who have similar or even greater difficulties, do not have the right to the allowance before the age of 18 because they are not blind or partially sighted. However, once these children reach the age of 18, they are entitled to this right under the

Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities Act. The Advocate found that Article 100(5) of the Pension and Disability Insurance Act discriminates against all sighted children who are insured under other health insurance schemes or pensioners and who, like blind persons, require the assistance of another person to carry out their basic needs of life and could therefore be entitled to the allowance. The defender has addressed a recommendation to the competent authorities to eliminate the legal loophole in the Pension and Disability Insurance Act or in the Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act, which regulates the childcare allowance, in such a way that children with special needs in a comparable situation to blind persons would also become entitled to the allowance or to a correspondingly increased childcare allowance.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Disability

Name of the court: Advocate of the Principle of Equality

Date of decision: 10 June 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: 050-2/2022/12

ECLI reference: N/A

Link: https://zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/OCENA_7.-clena-Zakona-o-volitvah-v-drzavni-zbor.pdf

Brief summary: The Advocate of the Principle of Equality, in accordance with Article 38 of the PADA, carried out an assessment of the discriminatory nature of Article 7 of the National Assembly Election Act. The Advocate found that the Act discriminates against persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities (direct discrimination on the grounds of disability). According to the Advocate, the provision unjustifiably allows only persons with these personal circumstances to be deprived of the right to vote. It provides exclusively for them to be deprived of the right to vote on the basis of an expert assessment of their capacity to understand the purpose, meaning and effect of elections, whereas for other citizens, such capacity is not assessed. The Advocate considered that such differential treatment was not justified and could not be regarded as an exception to the prohibition of discrimination. The Advocate also relied on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, European Convention on Human Rights and EU primary law, which protect all people from discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to vote to the same extent. The Advocate found that the measure is neither the appropriate, nor the only possible, nor a proportionate way of achieving the legitimacy of elections and preventing abuses in the casting of votes. It recommended that the Ministry of Public Administration eliminate discrimination by amending the law.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Racial or ethnic origin, other grounds

Name of the court: Advocate of the Principle of Equality

Date of decision: 6 July 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: 050-23/2021/9

ECLI reference: N/A

Link: <https://zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Ocena-diskriminatornosti-osmega-odstavka-18.-clena-zakona-o-mednarodni-zasciti.pdf>

Brief summary: The Advocate of the Principle of Equality carried out an assessment of the discriminatory character of Article 18(8) of the International Protection Act. This provides that the legal guardians of unaccompanied minors - applicants for international protection, may be dismissed from their position as legal guardians if they fail to provide the competent authorities with information about the unaccompanied minor which could be detrimental to the procedure for obtaining refugee or subsidiary protection status. The Advocate considered that the regulation was discriminatory. By allowing the legal guardian to be dismissed if certain information is withheld, the provision deprived the legal guardianship of its primary purpose, which is to establish a relationship of confidentiality between the guardians and the unaccompanied minors and to pursue their best interests. In this context, the dismissal of the legal guardian is foreseen only in international protection proceedings. In the procedure for assessing the discriminatory nature of the

regulation, the Ministry of the Interior failed to demonstrate that the provision should be regarded as a permissible exception to the prohibition of discrimination. The Advocate found that the provision unjustifiably disadvantaged the unaccompanied minors on the basis of their personal circumstances as applicants for international protection (direct discrimination under Article 6(2) of the PADA) and, indirectly, on the basis of their personal circumstances of nationality and ethnicity (Article 6(2) of the PADA). Only in international protection procedures are the minors placed under legal guardianship treated less favourably than the minors in other procedures as the legal guardian of the latter is not subject to dismissal in the event of non-disclosure of information. In accordance with Article 21 of the PADA, the Advocate recommended that the Ministry eliminate the discrimination by amending the legislation.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Religion or belief

Name of the court: Advocate of the Principle of Equality

Date of decision: 16 June 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: 0700-2/2019/98

ECLI reference: N/A

Link: <https://zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ODLOCBA-Izvajalec-javnega-prevoza-diskriminiral-na-podlagi-vere-ali-prepricanja-ponovljeni-postopek.pdf>.

Brief summary: On 4 July 2019, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality issued a decision in a case concerning a pro-life association whose marketing campaign had been terminated by the provider of marketing services. The association concluded a contract with the marketing agency on an advertising campaign on city buses. The advertisements were removed early as the campaign provoked a social media outcry since they were allegedly contrary to Article 55 of the Constitution guaranteeing the right of abortion. The Advocate found that the described treatment constituted discrimination on the grounds of religion. The elimination of advertisements and the termination of the contract meant that the association was prevented from accessing marketing services (advertising on the city buses) that are available to the public. The Advocate found that the city bus company instructed the marketing agency to remove the ads, hence the form of discrimination that was found in terms of the city bus company was 'instructions to discriminate' in line with Article 9 of PADA. The city bus company lodged a legal action to the Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia, claiming that the decision of the Advocate interfered with their constitutional 'freedom of enterprise' (Article 74 of the Constitution). They claimed that they were entitled to order the removal of the advertisements on the basis of the contract with the association as the advertisements provoked intolerance which is a ground for removal based on the terms and conditions of the city bus company. They also claimed that the case fell outside the material scope of the anti-discrimination law of the Republic of Slovenia. In the judgment of 10 November 2021, the Administrative Court found in favour of the claimant – the city bus company. The Court annulled the decision issued by the Advocate and ordered the Advocate to issue a new decision in a repeated administrative procedure, while following the court's instructions: to give more attention to weighing the opposing rights that are at stake in the case concerned; to verify which right of the association was violated; to further address whether the advertisement itself has to express intolerance for the company to have the right to remove it, or does it suffice for the advertisement to provoke intolerant discussions in the public space. In the repeated procedure, the Advocate, in accordance with the court's instructions, obtained additional information from the parties to the proceedings and confirmed the discrimination. After further checks as to why the institution's advertisement had been prematurely removed from a city bus, the Advocate found that this was only because some users of passenger transport services had raised a debate as to whether it was appropriate for an advertisement of an organisation that advocates the right to life from conception on the basis of religion to be placed on a city bus. The Advocate found that the association was only advertising their counselling programmes for people in need and that the advertisement itself did not have any elements that would incite intolerance. The premature removal of the advertisement was therefore discrimination on grounds of

religion and belief. This was the first ever advertisement to be removed prematurely from a city bus. The Advocate found that the city bus company violated Article 9 of the PADA by giving 'instructions to discriminate', thus violating the association's right to freedom of expression in connection with its beliefs.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Disability

Name of the court: Advocate of the Principle of Equality

Date of decision: 7 July 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: 0700-26/2021/18

ECLI reference: N/A

Link: https://zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Odlocba_Diskriminacija-zaposlene-z-invalidnostjo-pri-izplacilu-bozicnice.pdf

Brief summary: The Advocate received a complaint regarding the alleged discrimination on the grounds of the complainant's medical condition linked to her personal circumstances of disability. The company where she was employed set attendance at work as the criterion for determining the amount of the Christmas bonus. This criterion also resulted in a lower award for the applicant, who, due to her medical condition and disability, had to be absent from work due to sick leave and was awaiting a transfer to a more suitable post. The Advocate found that the bonus was calculated on the basis of the applicant's actual attendance at work (as a proportion of her full potential attendance) and that the company did not take into account her disadvantaged position due to her medical condition or disability. The Advocate found that the company had not demonstrated that its conduct constituted an exception to the prohibition of indirect discrimination. The defender found that the company had unfairly deprived the complainant of Christmas bonuses from 2017 to 2021 and infringed the prohibition of indirect discrimination set out in Article 6(2) in conjunction with Article 4 of the PADA.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Religion or belief

Name of the court: Advocate of the Principle of Equality

Date of decision: 19 September 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: 0700-9/2022/9

ECLI reference: N/A

Link: https://zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Odlocba_Radijska-postaja-diskriminirala-politicne-stranke-na-podlagi-vere-ali-prepricanja.pdf

Brief summary: The Advocate of the Principle of Equality received a complaint about a certain religious radio station that sent notifications to several political parties about a series of debates with the representatives of political parties and movements that would be participating in the next parliamentary elections. The radio station expressly mentioned that the possibility of taking part in a debate would be given only to 'parties whose programmes and speeches do not contradict (directly or indirectly) the teachings of [a specific religious organisation] and the [religious] values associated with them'. The Advocate found that before the national elections, the radio station discriminated against certain political parties whose programmes and speeches contradicted the teachings of the Catholic Church. It allowed them to present their views in a similar way to other parties, but treated them unfairly and less favourably. It published their presentations only only reading a summary, while it presented the positions of parties that do not oppose Catholic teaching by publishing audio recordings of conversations with their parliamentary candidates. The Advocate found that the radio station's editorial staff had failed to prove that its conduct constituted an exception to the prohibition of direct discrimination, as required by Article 40 of the PADA. The radio station thus discriminated against certain parties on the grounds of religion or belief in the area of access to goods and services available to the public, as prohibited by Article 4 in connection with Article (6)1 of the PADA. In its latest letter to the Advocate, the radio station stated that, in accordance with the Advocate's decision, it would act in the future to remedy the discrimination found.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Disability

Name of the court: Advocate of the Principle of Equality

Date of decision: 22 November 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: 050-29/2020/12

ECLI reference: N/A

Link: <https://zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Zakon-o-socialnem-vkljucevanju-invalidov-po-oceni-Zagovornika-diskriminatoren.pdf>.

Brief summary: The Advocate of the Principle of Equality received a petition for review of the allegedly discriminatory regulation of the disability status and the related entitlements under the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities Act. The petitioner describes the case of an individual with a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. At first, the individual was issued with a decision of unemployability and granted the right to allowance in accordance with the Act, but then, on the grounds that the diagnosis in question constituted a mental illness and not a mental disorder, the right was withdrawn. The petitioner submitted that the definition of the status of a person with disability under the Act is inconsistent with the principle of non-discrimination, as it unjustifiably excludes certain categories of individuals (such as those diagnosed with mental illnesses) from the circle of beneficiaries. The Advocate assesses the discriminatory character of a law pursuant to Article 38 of the PADA. Under this provision, the Advocate has the discretionary power to submit a legal instrument to the Constitutional Court for constitutional review, if the Advocate assesses that the law is discriminatory. In order to be able to do that, the Advocate first has to carry out an assessment procedure itself. This procedure has no formal effect – only the Constitutional Court may annul the law. In the assessment, the Advocate found that the regulation according to which persons diagnosed with long-term mental illnesses, which make them unable to integrate into society and provide social security for themselves, are excluded from the circle of beneficiaries of the recognition of the disability status and the related entitlements under the Act, constitutes a violation of the prohibition of discrimination under Article 6 of the PADA (direct discrimination). Namely, their situation is comparable to that of other persons who may be granted disability status under the Act. This particular category of persons with disabilities are consequently deprived of the right to minimum social security (under Article 52 in conjunction with Article 50 of the Constitution). As the Advocate has detected discriminatory provisions in the specific case, the Advocate will submit a recommendation to the competent ministry for the necessary amendment of the Act and elimination of discrimination. The Advocate will then consider filing a request for a review of the constitutionality of the Act and its submission to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Racial or ethnic origin

Name of the court: Advocate of the Principle of Equality

Date of decision: 19 December 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: 0700-8/2022/48

ECLI reference: N/A

Link: https://zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Odlocba_Diskriminacija-Romov-pri-postrezbi-v-lokalu.pdf

Brief summary: The Advocate of the Principle of Equality received anonymous information from a third party that a bar had refused to serve drinks to three guests because they were Roma. The waitress explained to them that she cannot serve them drinks because a group of Roma persons fought in the bar the previous day. She apologised and further explained that if she were to serve them, it would mean that she would have to serve the other Roma. That they would not be served was confirmed by two owners or managers of the bar. The three guests were shocked by their explanation and left the bar but felt inferior and humiliated by this event. The informant claimed discrimination based on ethnic origin. On the basis of the notification, the Advocate initiated an *ex officio* procedure to establish possible discrimination, in accordance with Article 34 of the PADA. The Advocate found that it was a case of general relevance for the protection against discrimination, since no

personal circumstances of an individual or group could justify the denial of access to certain goods or services. The Advocate concluded that the bar has failed, in accordance with its burden of proof, to prove that the reason for refusing to serve the three persons in the establishment was not their personal circumstances of ethnic origin. The Advocate found by refusing to serve three persons of Roma ethnic origin, the bar had violated Article 6(1) of the PADA.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Disability, other grounds

Name of the court: Advocate of the Principle of Equality

Date of decision: 22 December 2022

Name of the parties: N/A

Reference number: 050-2/2018/22

ECLI reference: N/A

Link: <https://zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Ocena-diskriminatornosti-Po-oceni-Zagovornika-je-sedanja-ureditev-mirovanja-poklicnega-zavarovanja-diskriminatorna.pdf>

Brief summary: The Advocate of the Principle of Equality carried out an assessment of the discriminatory nature of parts of the Pension and Disability Insurance Act that determine the period during which employers are not obliged to pay occupational insurance contributions to employees. Occupational insurance comprises compulsory inclusion into occupational insurance and the rights and obligations arising from insurance in the event of old age and death. Employers contribute to the personal accounts of insured persons, on the basis of which the insured persons acquire the right to an occupational pension and other rights provided by the Pension and Disability Insurance Act. Those insured are persons who perform work that is particularly arduous and harmful to health, and those who perform work that cannot be successfully pursued after a certain age. The Advocate of the Principle of Equality received a complaint regarding two provisions of the Act, claiming discrimination on different grounds. Under Article 38 of the PADA, the Advocate has the discretionary power to submit a legal instrument to the Constitutional Court for constitutional review, if the Advocate assesses that the law is discriminatory. In order to be able to do that, the Advocate first has to carry out an assessment procedure itself. This procedure has no formal effect – only the Constitutional Court may annul the law. However, in this way, the Advocate can take a position on a certain legal provision from the perspective of its mandate. The Advocate identified the personal circumstance of disability as a relevant personal circumstance in the case of suspension of occupational insurance when the insured person is receiving allowance during the period when he or she is included in vocational rehabilitation in accordance with the regulations on pension and disability insurance. In this respect, the Advocate concluded that the restriction on occupational insurance places employees who perform work that cannot be successfully performed professionally after a certain age at an unjustified disadvantage compared with other employees because of their personal circumstances of disability. The Advocate also found discrimination due to personal circumstances regarding parenthood and gender. As the Advocate has detected discriminatory provisions in the specific case, the Advocate will submit a recommendation to the competent ministry for the elimination of the assessed discriminatory provisions or further activities to be carried out in accordance with Article 38 of the PADA, namely the preparation of a request for a review of the constitutionality of the Act and its submission to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia.

ANNEX 1: INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS**Country: Slovenia****Date: 1 January 2023**

Instrument	Date of signature (if not signed please indicate) Dd/mm/YYYY	Date of ratification (if not ratified please indicate) Dd/mm/YYYY	Derogations / reservations relevant to equality and non-discrimination	Right of individual petition accepted?	Can this instrument be directly relied upon in domestic courts by individuals?
European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)	14 May 1993	28 May 1994	No	Yes	Yes
Protocol 12, ECHR	7 March 2001	7 July 2010	No	Yes	Yes
Revised European Social Charter	11 Oct 1997	7 May 1999	Declaration on Part II, Articles 13, 18 (2).	Yes	Yes
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	16 July 1993 (succession)	18 Aug 1993 (entry into force)	No	Yes	Yes
Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities	1 Feb 1995	25 March 1998	No	N/A	Yes
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	6 July 1992 (succession)	6 July 1992 (entry into force)	No	N/A	Yes
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	6 July 1992 (succession)	6 July 1992 (entry into force)	No	Yes	Yes
ILO Convention No. 111 on Discrimination	29 May 1992	29 May 1992	Yes	Yes	Yes
Convention on the Rights of the Child	6 July 1992	25 June 1991 (entry into force)	No	Yes	Yes

Instrument	Date of signature (if not signed please indicate) Dd/mm/yyyy	Date of ratification (if not ratified please indicate) Dd/mm/yyyy	Derogations / reservations relevant to equality and non-discrimination	Right of individual petition accepted?	Can this instrument be directly relied upon in domestic courts by individuals?
	(succession)				
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	30 March 2007	24 April 2008	No	Yes	Yes

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