



A “Third Country” Migrant’s Experience in Slovenia

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Abstract:

Migrants from the so-called third countries in Slovenia face the same problems regarding employment and working conditions as Slovenian and EU citizens. But, besides the general problems which are the results of economic and political hardships in Slovenia, there are also specific migrant problems such as bureaucratic obstacles, non-existence of migrants' social networks, discursive constraints such as strong stereotyping and similar problems which make migrants' working conditions even more difficult.

Since I came to Slovenia as a migrant from Serbia ten years ago, I’ve experienced almost all employment statuses and worked in different working conditions. I came to Ljubljana as a holder of the HESP scholarship for postgraduate studies in anthropology and media studies. Soon after I came, I realized that I couldn’t afford to study full time because I needed to find an additional job to cover my stay in Slovenia. The HESP scholarship wasn’t enough to cover all my life expenses. I had a student status and the temporary student permit, so my first step in finding a job was to go to the Student employment office (Student services office), the organisation which mediates between students and employers. The student labour market is very attractive for employers because they do not have to pay taxes, social, health and pension insurance if they employ a student. On the other hand, it is only a temporary solution for students. When a student loses his/her student status he/she also loses the opportunity to work as a student and can have a really hard time in finding a “real” job. That's why many students in Slovenia prolong their studies in order to be able to work and not in order to study.

Since I decided to go to the PhD studies, my student status was prolonged for two more years and I was permitted to work as a student. That means that employers didn’t pay any social or pension insurance for me for the years of my work as a student in Slovenia.

The student labour market is the same for all kinds of student groups in Slovenia. The only specific characteristic for me as a migrant student is that I didn’t know Slovenian so well as to enable me to work as a professional with a student status. Therefore, I didn’t have much choice during my studies, and in the beginning, I had to work as an unskilled worker. For example, I worked as an assembly line worker in factories and enterprises although I already

had a B.Sc. in Serbian language and literature from the Belgrade University in Serbia, and a substantial experience as a journalist. This situation forms a *circulus vitiosus* for many students in Slovenia and particularly for migrant students without financial support which would enable them to concentrate only on their studies. Namely, they have to take low-skilled and low-paid jobs and as a result of that, they don't have enough time for their studies, so their studying in Slovenia turns into its contrariety. They work instead of study and, in the beginning, they work as unskilled workers. In that way, migration for the purpose of studying, changes its purpose.

The majority of students from the former Yugoslav republics in Slovenia started to work as translators very soon after learning Slovenian (or at least starting to understand it). Slovenia has very tight economic connections with the ex-Yugoslav region. This is why there is a huge demand for translators from Slovenian into the ex-Yugoslav languages. This opportunity is eagerly seized by the students but it's once again a double-edged sword. Everybody translates, regardless of their knowledge of their native tongue or their linguistic education. Thus, the level of quality translations is lowered and that damages the communication between Slovenia and the other ex-Yugoslav countries. On the other side, translators' requirements are reduced solely to low rates, while qualifications and quality of their work are less important. Translators in Slovenia work in terrible conditions, without any contracts binding the employers to honour the agreement, without any organisations representing them and standing up for their rights, with their rates constantly being lowered, and their professional rights being denied. We can say that translators are completely disempowered and, speaking of the ex-Yugoslav languages, most of them are migrants or of migrant descent.

After receiving my PhD, I have had a very difficult time in entering the Slovenian labour market. I couldn't work as a student any more, and I couldn't find any job at all. It's not only that jobs in my professional field of occupation and fitting my professional qualifications were out of my reach, but I couldn't get any kind of job. I sent more than a hundred applications but without success.

This brings us to another problem of Slovenia in relation to employment. It is a small country, where people are interconnected by friendly, family and other relations. Vacancies for all the good jobs are announced mainly in order to meet formal requirements, while the candidate had already been chosen beforehand. This is especially difficult for migrants because, in a new country, they don't have the social networks which are necessary to obtain a good job in Slovenia.

As a researcher, translator and journalist, speaking Serbian, Slovenian and English, I was finally employed by the Serbian Cultural Centre last year. This is a non-governmental organization dealing with (Serbian) minority issues. As a Serbian immigrant and a professional in social sciences and media, I couldn't find employment in any sector other than the NGO and particularly in an organization which is a part of the minority and migrant community. At the moment, I also host a radio show in Serbian language at the Radio Študent,

an independent and non-commercial radio which promotes subculture, alternative and underground culture and minorities' cultures. In most cases migrants and minorities work in closed subculture systems and it is very difficult for their stories, culture, needs and problems to find their way to the mainstream media and wider public. Strong stereotypes and negative connotations about migrants from ex Yugoslav republics which are present in public discourse also narrow one's chances for employment.

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