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## The Socioeconomic Position of National Minorities with a Special Emphasis on Slovenes in Croatia over the Past Thirty Years

The article presents the situation of members of the Slovene community in Croatia, focusing on selected aspects of their socioeconomic participation (inclusion) in Croatian society. This topic has not been thoroughly studied yet, firstly due to the low interest of researchers in the position and activities of members of the Slovene community in Croatia, and secondly due to a continuous lack of data on the socioeconomic participation of members of not only the Slovene community but of all minorities in Croatia in general. Based on the analysis of data mainly collected from Croatian official reports, the situation of members of the Slovene minority in Croatia is presented mainly in relation to the exercise of their rights to education and employment.

**Keywords:** national minorities in Croatia, Slovene minority in Croatia, socioeconomic participation of national minority, education of national minority, labour market.

### Socialno-ekonomski položaj narodnih manjšin s posebnim poudarkom na Slovencih na Hrvaškem v zadnjih tridesetih letih

*V članku je predstavljen položaj pripadnikov slovenske skupnosti na Hrvaškem s poudarkom na izbranih vidikih njihove socialno-ekonomske vključenosti v hrvaško družbo. Gre za tematiko, ki zaradi skromnega raziskovalnega interesa za položaj in delovanje slovenske skupnosti na Hrvaškem ter pomanjkljivih podatkov o socialno-ekonomski vključenosti ne le slovenske, temveč vseh manjšin na Hrvaškem, še ni bila temeljito raziskana. Na podlagi analize podatkov, večinoma zbranih iz hrvaških uradnih evidenc, je položaj pripadnikov slovenske skupnosti na Hrvaškem predstavljen predvsem iz vidika uresničevanja njihovih pravic do izobraževanja in zaposlitve.*

**Ključne besede:** narodne manjšine na Hrvaškem, slovenska manjšina na Hrvaškem, socialno-ekonomska vključenost narodne manjšine, izobraževanje narodne manjšine, trg dela.

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## 1. Introduction

Two types of ethnic minorities can be distinguished in Croatia: national minorities – i.e., the ethnic groups traditionally living in Croatia and recognised by the Croatian Constitution (22 in total, which is a Croatian peculiarity) – and various groups of immigrants living in Croatia. This article presents selected data and conclusions on the national minorities in Croatia with a special emphasis on the Slovene national minority.

Croatia has a population of 3,871,833, of which 240,079 are members of constitutionally recognised national minorities. 91.63 % of the total population are Croats, and only 6.20 % are members of (the 22) national minorities (CBS 2021). In 2011, national minorities accounted for 7.67 % of the population (CBS 2013), while in 2001 their share was 7.47 % (Tatalović 2006, 47). This demonstrates that over the past few decades, the Croatian society has become increasingly ethnically homogenous.

The status of national minorities as we know it today was established in 1990 when the first Croatian Constitution was adopted. It guaranteed non-discrimination and equality for all, including minorities (Tatalović 2006, 47). By 2000, the status of the members of national minorities did not change much and the legislation on national minorities in Croatia continued to evolve up until present day.

The aim of this article is to illustrate the status of the members of the Slovene national minority in Croatia with a special emphasis on some elements relating to their socioeconomic position. The following research questions have been formulated: (1) Is it possible to provide a general insight into the socioeconomic situation among the Slovene national minority in Croatia? (2) What are the main characteristics that can be derived from Croatia's official data on minority issues?

As the topic suggested is very broad and manifold, the article will focus on selected social (education) and economic (labour market) aspects.

Some of the aspects studied to measure the situation in Croatian society are overlapping. Combining them can give us a more comprehensive picture of the socioeconomic situation among the members of national minorities in Croatia.

In such context, it is also important to emphasise that the main problem in doing research for this article was the lack of data. That is not specific only for members of national minorities in Croatia but is symptomatic of other Europeans countries as well. In some countries, the monitoring of socioeconomic participation appears almost absent, while in others only specific aspects are highlighted (Cârstocea 2018, 7), which makes it possible to conclude that the situation is similar also for members of the Slovene minority in Croatia. It would be hard pressed to find comprehensive and regularly collected data about many national minorities (e.g. the Turkish minority in Romania, the Frisian minor-

ity in Germany (Cârstocea & Willis 2021)). An exception thereto is the Roma community whose socioeconomic situation has earned considerable attention (Cârstocea & Willis 2021). In Croatia, it is possible to find some data for the members of the Roma minority and the Serbian minority (MRGI 2003; Bakalović et al. 2013; Lapat & Miljević-Riđički 2019; Klasnić et al. 2020; Paravina 2022), but for other minorities data is scarce.

As regards the members of the Slovene minority in Croatia, there is a lack of data in all areas. Thus, there is no data on citizenship, their position on the labour market, healthcare issues, etc. It is, however, possible to find some data on employment (but just in state bodies, not in the private sector) and the teaching of the Slovene language.

The article draws on the conclusions of various research projects (Medvešek 2017; Medvešek & Novak Lukanović 2016; Medvešek & Riman 2017; Medvešek & Riman 2018a; Medvešek & Riman 2018b). The comparison and analysis of available and collected data allow us to answer the above research questions and fulfil the aim of the article.

Most of the data presented herein has been retrieved from Croatian state reports (Report on the implementation of the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia and the expenditure of funds provided in the State Budget for the needs of national minorities from year 2003 to 2022), reports of different minority groups in Croatia, and results of previous research on Slovene minority issues in Croatia.

## 2. Legislation

After the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, many people belonging to the constitutionally recognised majority groups (nations and nationalities) in former republics and provinces became members of linguistic, national, or ethnic minorities (Vukas 1978, 53–54). The regime of minority rights protection that Croatia inherited from the former Yugoslavia only covered the old minorities.<sup>1</sup> Thus, a problem arose with the protection of the rights of the new minorities, namely members of the other six constituent nations of the former common state (Serbs, Slovenes, Bosniaks, Macedonians, and Montenegrins). Therefore, in December 1991, the Croatian Parliament adopted the Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms of National and Ethnic Communities, which was also a precondition for Croatia's recognition as an independent state in January 1992 (Tatalović 2006, 53).

Legislation and the practical implementation of ethnic minorities' rights became not only an important test for Croatia, but also a benchmark by which to measure its democratic achievements; it was also an essential precondition of economic and political integration into Europe. One of the preconditions for Croatia's international recognition was legislation to protect all ethnic minori-

ties. A particular challenge in terms of regulation and practical exercise of the rights of national minorities was the large Serbian national minority.

By adopting international standards, Croatia achieved a high level of protection for minorities in its legislation. However, this was not a reflection of a genuine internal political will to resolve minority issues, but rather the result of international pressures. The change in the protection of the rights of national minorities in Croatia coincided with the change of the political party in power that occurred in 2000 (Tatalović 2006). That year, two laws, one on the official use of minority languages and scripts and the other one on education in national minority languages, were adopted.

The Constitutional Law of the Rights of National Minorities adopted in 2002 is an upgrade of the 1991 Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms of National and Ethnic Communities. Its key elements included the promotion of the following minority rights:

- the use of minorities' language and script, privately and in public and official use;
- education in the minority language and script;
- the use of minorities' signs and symbols;
- cultural autonomy to preserve, develop and express one's culture, and preservation and protection of one's cultural assets and traditions;
- the right to profess one's religion and to establish religious communities together with other members of that religion;
- access to the media and to receive and forward information in minorities' language and script;
- self-organisation and association for the purpose of exercising mutual interests;
- representation in the representative bodies at the state and local level, and in administrative and judicial bodies;
- participation in public life and in management of local affairs through councils and representatives of national minorities; and
- protection from any activity which endangers or may endanger minorities' existence, and the exercise of rights and freedoms (Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities 2002).

Minority rights have substantially advanced over the past decade. All of the 22 national minorities have almost equal rights. The difference lies in the possibilities of political participation, which depends on the number of their members.

### 3. Slovenes in Croatia

Slovenes in Croatia acquired the status of a minority in December 1990 when they were included in the new Croatian Constitution (Croatian Parliament n. d.).

Ever since the beginning of their formation as a national minority, they have primarily engaged in the protection of their cultural and linguistic identity (Tatalović 1997, 97). The members of the Slovene minority are apolitical and confine themselves to participation in Slovene associations where they foster Slovene language and culture. The fact that there are no Slovene cultural or research centres also strongly affects their position in Croatia. Their organisation is limited to cultural associations, they have not been able to fully exercise their right to learn their mother tongue at school, and have not taken advantage of the opportunities for active political involvement in local and regional government (Riman & Zver 2020).

Compared to Croatia where Slovenes became a minority and acquired rights similar to all other old and new minorities, Slovenia's attitude towards Slovenes in Croatia is relatively undefined. Moreover, the diversity within the Slovene minority itself fosters a spectrum of perspectives on Slovenia's role. Hence, each individual within this minority ascribes a distinct significance to Slovenia, a perception moulded by their personal experiences and connections, viewing it either as their kin-state, their country of origin, or a neighbouring country.

A review of official documents and proceedings of roundtables organised in the aftermath of gaining independence reveals that Slovenia was not willing to support and accept the newly formed Slovene minority in Croatia (Kržišnik-Bukić 1998). Until 1995, Slovenia did not even take a stance on the status of Slovenes in Croatia. Politicians and researchers were well aware, though, that the new Slovene minority was somewhat special due to the long common history of the two newly formed countries and that the newly demarcated border changed any hitherto relations. This was probably one of the reasons why the status of Slovenes in Croatia after 1990 remained an open issue and has not yet been fully resolved to date. Even more so, reservations about this minority were expressed, e.g. by the Foreign Minister stating in 1996 that Slovenes in Croatia had not formally applied for recognition as a minority nor had they organised themselves politically, and that this was a political issue that raised similar questions about Croats in Slovenia (Zelnik 2013).

It is important to stress that, like other minorities in Croatia, the Slovene minority is seen as a homogeneous group, but it is extremely heterogeneous and dispersed throughout the country. In addition to co-native members, the Slovene minority also includes a considerably large number of immigrants who moved to Croatia for economic reasons in the 1950s, as well as other immigrants who arrived from the kin-state in the time frame under discussion. These mainly include independent women, highly educated individuals and professionals, students, and pensioners. It is also important to mention that the sense of belonging to the Slovene minority differs depending on the age of its members who tend to perceive their identity, the border, and the political system differently.

The Slovenes' sociodemographic position in society is best illustrated by the existing sociodemographic data. Censuses are indeed interesting for both Croatian and foreign researchers, because Croatia still collects data on the nationality of its population. That is not the case in other European countries.

Data about national minorities from the 2011 and 2021 censuses are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Number of national minorities in 2011 and 2021**

National minority	Census 2011		Census 2021	
	Number	%	Number	%
Serbs	186,633	4.36	123,892	3.20
Bosniaks	31,479	0.73	24,131	0.62
Roma	16,975	0.40	17,980	0.46
Albanians	17,513	0.41	13,871	0.36
Italians	17,807	0.42	13,763	0.36
Hungarians	14,048	0.33	10,315	0.27
Czechs	9,641	0.22	7,862	0.2
Slovenes	10,517	0.25	7,729	0.2
Slovaks	4,753	0.11	3,688	0.1
Macedonians	4,138	0.10	3,555	0.09
Montenegrins	4,517	0.11	3,127	0.08
Germans	2,965	0.07	3,034	0.08
Ukrainians	1,878	0.04	1,905	0.05
Russians	1,279	0.03	1,481	0.04
Ruthenians	1,936	0.05	1,343	0.03
Poles	672	0.02	657	0.02
Jewesses (Jews)	509	0.01	410	0.01
Turks	367	0.01	404	0.01
Romanians	435	0.01	337	0.01
Austrians	279	0.01	265	0.01
Bulgarians	350	0.01	262	0.01
Vlachs	29	0.0	22	0.0

Source: CBS 2013; CBS 2021.

For most national minorities, the number of their members decreased. Exceptions include Germans,<sup>2</sup> Roma, Russians, Turks, and Ukrainians. However, the examples reported in Table 1 are not the largest decreases among members of national minorities in Croatia. The largest decrease was recorded after 1991. Between 1991 and 2001, the minority population in Croatia dropped from 22 % to under 8 %. The reasons for such include: (1) a nationalist policy; (2) migra-

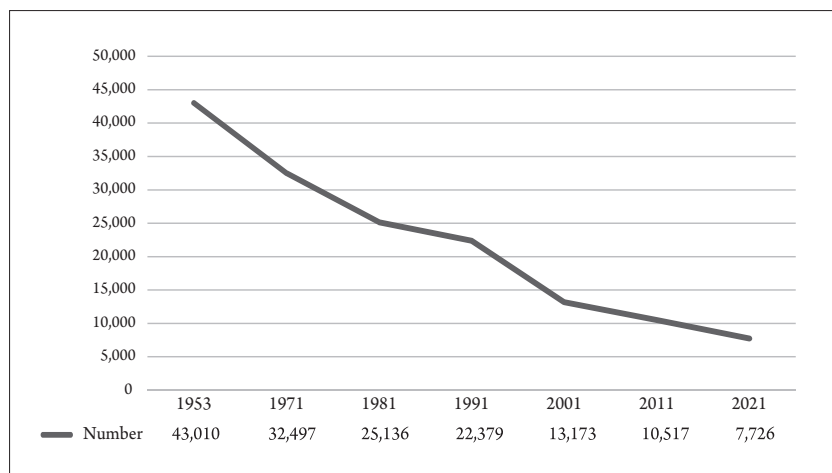


tion towards urban areas which resulted in the weakening of rural communities, discontinuing traditional trades and links with the minority cultural heritage; (3) migration within the regions and overseas, particularly during and after the 1991–95 Croatian war; (4) improved education resulting in greater social mobility for members of ethnic minorities; (5) a rise in ethnically-mixed marriages; (6) the weakening of cohesive elements of ethnicity, which are being replaced by professional or social group identity, or even by regional identities (Tatalović 2002, 66–67).

The above reasons are important also for the Slovene minority, but it is possible to add some more that are characteristic of it. Every minority in Croatia has its reasons why their number is decreasing, but not all reasons have been identified yet. Some of the reasons relating to the Slovene minority are: (1) decline in immigration from Slovenia; (2) dying of members of the Slovene minority (most members are old aged) ever since World War II; (3) returning to Slovenia (Pajnič 2018, 72).

The changes in the number of Slovenes in Croatia are shown in Graph 1. In 2011, they were the oldest national minority in Croatia, with an average age of 59.7 years compared to the national average of 41.7 years (Medvešek & Riman 2017, 185, 216). Slovenes in Croatia are an urban population, with an unequal gender structure meaning there are more women than men (Kržišnik-Bukić 2006, 50; Pajnič 2018, 70).

**Graph 1: Number of members of the Slovene national minority 1953–2021**



Source: Kržišnik-Bukić 2006; CBS 2013; CBS 2021.

The (self)organisation of members of the Slovene national minority is low and concentrated in cultural associations, 16 in total. They are located in different parts of Croatia and are the most important entities for the implementation

of the rights of the Slovene minority (Riman 2022a). Another problem of this community is the (old) age of its active members and the fact that most of its efforts are focused on the preservation of the Slovene language and culture in Croatia. Other important aspects (e.g., economics, political participation, etc.) are neglected as there is no interest in such (Riman 2021a, 297–300).

The members of the Slovene minority often go unnoticed in Croatian society. They are apolitical and do not have their own parliamentary representative.<sup>3</sup> In the Croatian parliament, the Slovene community is represented by a woman from the Albanian national minority and collaboration is minimum. The Slovene minority also does not have a political party of its own. Some members are active in Croatian political life but are not active within the Slovene community. Therefore, the latter does not recognise them as members and equals.

There have been attempts from some members of the Slovene national minority to participate in Croatian parliamentary elections, but the number of votes was too low to enter the parliament. In 2003, the Slovene candidate only obtained 630 votes compared to the winning candidate from the Bosniak national minority with 2711 votes. In 2015, the Slovene candidate got a mere 143 votes, and the seat went to the candidate who represents the Slovene community still today (Riman & Zver 2020, 87).

The Slovene minority does not have daily, weekly, or monthly newspapers nor special radio or TV channels, and it does not have preschool education in Slovene. There is no public space where it would be possible to use the Slovene language regularly, which means that its use is limited to Slovene cultural associations and family and the rare primary and secondary schools where Slovene is taught as mother tongue. According to some studies, there is no intergenerational transmission of the Slovene language in Croatia and students who learn Slovene at school or in the Slovene cultural associations often learn it as second language (Riman 2022b, 300).

Slovenes live in geographical areas where the risk of poverty is relatively small. In general, members of the Slovene national minority have an above-average level of education. Often, they send their children to study abroad, mostly to Slovenia, where it is possible to receive a scholarship from the Republic of Slovenia. Many of them, and their children too, have dual citizenship (Croatian and Slovene) (Medvešek & Riman 2017, 217). Dual citizenship also allows them to enter both labour markets (in Slovenia and Croatia) and, depending on the situation, they can declare themselves members of either one or the other nationality.

Croatia signed international agreements on bilateral protection of national minorities with Italy, Hungary, Serbia, and Montenegro but no such agreement has been signed with Slovenia, which significantly prejudices the status of the Slovene national minority in Croatia. No agreement has been reached because Slovenia does not recognise Croats in Slovenia (just like Bosniaks, Macedonians,



Serbs, and Montenegrins) as a national minority. They enjoy some rights (e.g., learning their mother tongue) but they do not have equal rights like Italians or Hungarians who enjoy bilateral protection and thus have better opportunities to exercise their rights.

While there is some data on the sociodemographic status of national minorities in Croatia, recent data on the socioeconomic situation is difficult to find. Some factors relating to the socioeconomic situation are measurable while others are quite difficult to recognise.

The socioeconomic participation of national minorities can be assessed through two key dimensions. The first dimension pertains to economic horizontal inequality, which involves disparities in access to and ownership of assets, employment opportunities, incomes, and the labour market. The second dimension relates to social horizontal inequality, encompassing aspects such as education, healthcare, and housing. It is worth noting that the dimension of economic horizontal inequality has been studied more extensively than other forms of horizontal inequality.

A general lack of statistical data regarding the socioeconomic situation of national minorities could be one of the reasons for the lack of consistency and structure. Research shows that ethnic groups often face economic discrimination, resulting in unequal access to and ownership of assets, employment opportunities, and incomes (Gurr 2000). Many national minorities record higher unemployment, but the collected data are disaggregated. Some studies show that young people from ethnic minorities and immigrant backgrounds are more likely to be unemployed than native youth (Froy & Pyne 2011, 10). National minorities are disproportionately reliant on the private sector for employment. Moreover, issues related to intersectionality are also present, with minority women (Merhaut 2019) often facing discrimination on two demographic fronts (Cârstocea & Willis 2021).

Social horizontal inequality has received less research attention. There are documented examples of the exclusion and discrimination Roma children face in education (Farkas 2014; Brüggemann & D'Arcy 2017; Eliason 2017;), as well as issues involving children belonging to other minority groups which, however, are less studied (Lendák-Kabók et al. 2020; Paravina 2022; Doleschal 2023). Some other important issues include barriers to accessing healthcare for national minorities, issues related to their insurance status, health literacy, communication issues due to linguistic differences, discrimination, and lack of trust.

It is important to note that sectoral inequalities do not exist independently of one another but are usually interlinked. Poor housing conditions have been demonstrably linked to poor mental and physical health, lower levels of education, and lower income levels. Social inequality is highly associated with economic horizontal inequality.

As mentioned above, there is a lack of interest and data concerning the Slovene minority in Croatia. With no public discrimination, name-calling and

labelling in the media, there is no interest in research, but there are indeed some hidden challenges that the community has to face. Therefore, the article will focus on those aspects of socioeconomic participation for which at least some data are available. The article can be considered as a first attempt to study the socioeconomic participation of members of the Slovene minority in Croatia.

Here, we will analyse two important aspects of the social horizontal dimension: labour market and education, with a special emphasis on the Slovene national minority. These are also the categories according to which we can estimate the position of some other national minorities in the Croatian society for whom it is possible to retrieve data that are collected by state offices and ministers.

### 3.1 Members of the Slovene National Minority on the Croatian Labour Market

The conclusions of some studies show that minority employees repeatedly experience unfavourable treatment when applying for a job and are often remunerated worse than their majority counterparts (Altonji & Pierret 2001; Baert 2018; Barr & Oduro 2002; Lippens et al. 2021). As a consequence, they are less likely to be satisfied with their job or committed to the organisation they work for and are more prone to experiencing mental and physical health issues (Paradies et al. 2015).

In Croatia, members of various national minorities are not treated equally on the labour market. Thus, for example, the position of the Serbs or the Roma is (probably) more difficult than that of other minorities (Bakalović et al. 2013). In fact, the Roma and the Serbs have been experiencing discrimination, the latter mainly as a result of the war that ravaged Croatia between 1991 and 1995 (Freedom House 2022). Some scarce studies about the position of the members of national minorities in Croatia reveal that there are no official quantitative data about the specific national minorities that are most discriminated (or discriminated at all) (Petr Balog 2004; Bakalović et al. 2013; Kunac et al. 2018). Discrimination of certain ethnic groups is less visible in larger cities, e.g. Zagreb or Rijeka, but more so in smaller cities that still experience the legacy of war and the divisions emerging therefrom. In larger cities, the members of national minorities are integrated in society but in rural areas they are more exposed and vulnerable (Bakalović et al. 2013). There is no consensus about this issue (except urban-rural relation). For each national minority in Croatia the situation is different and determined by geographical factors and factors of ethnic (non) favouritism.

Serbs, for instance, experience difficulties in geographical areas that were affected by the war. For other national minorities, there are other geographical areas where they live but feel they are not always welcome.

Factors of ethnic (non)favouritism are present among the Roma, with stereotypes among the population that the Roma are lazy and taking advantage of the system. Serbs experienced discrimination in the armed forces and the police and were dismissed for “security reasons” (Bakalović et al. 2013).

The labour market presence of national minorities in public administration can be illustrated based on data collected from various Reports.<sup>4</sup> A minority right is also representation in the bodies at the state and local level and in administrative and judicial bodies of the Government, and it is thus possible to see how many of them are involved in different state bodies. It is important to emphasise that this is a minority right, which means that the state is, in a way, forced to also employ members of national minorities in the state administration. Data for the period 2014–2021 are presented in Table 2.

*Table 2: Share of members of national minorities employed in state administration and professional services and offices of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2014–2021*

National minority	Year							
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Albanians	0.03 %	0.03 %	0.03 %	0.03%	0.04 %	0.05 %	0.05%	0.06 %
Bosniaks	0.22 %	0.21 %	0.21 %	0.2 %	0.18 %	0.17 %	0.17 %	0.17 %
Czechs	0.16 %	0.15 %	0.16 %	0.17 %	0.16 %	0.16 %	0.15 %	0.17 %
Hungarians	0.17 %	0.17 %	0.18 %	0.19 %	0.19 %	0.17 %	0.17 %	0.16 %
Roma	0.01 %	0.01 %	0.02 %	0.02 %	0.02 %	0.02 %	0.02 %	0.03 %
Slovenes	<b>0.09 %</b>	<b>0.09 %</b>	<b>0.08 %</b>	<b>0.08 %</b>	<b>0.08 %</b>	<b>0.08 %</b>	<b>0.08 %</b>	<b>0.07 %</b>
Serbs	2.31 %	2.23 %	2.22 %	2.19 %	2.11 %	2.05 %	0.97 %	1.94 %
Italians	0.17 %	0.17 %	0.19 %	0.18 %	0.17 %	0.18 %	0.17 %	0.16 %
Others	0.29 %	0.29 %	0.3 %	0.29 %	0.28 %	0.27 %	0.28 %	0.28 %
Total	3.49 %	3.4 %	3.4 %	3.34 %	3.24 %	3.16 %	3.07 %	3.03 %

Source: GRC 2015; GRC 2018; GRC 2019a; GRC 2019b; GRC 2021a; GRC 2021b; GRC 2022.

Table 2 reveals that the share of employees with minority background is decreasing. The Report did not provide information for all national minorities but just for some of them. Likewise, it is impossible to make an overview of all the years from the introduction of the Law (2003) till 2021 (we are still expecting the 2022 Report to be published). For the first few years of reporting, data on national minorities are not disaggregated.

It was assumed that the number of minority employees would increase, but instead it decreased. One of the reasons is that also the overall number of members of national minorities on the state level decreased.

No other data about the national minorities' disadvantaged position and inequalities on the labour market can be found. The data displayed here are not data on discrimination but rather data illustrating the position of minorities in the Croatian society. Some national minorities have more members employed in state administration and some have less. Their number is in correlation with their share in the Croatian society. For the Roma and the Albanians, the number of employees is much lower than for the members of some other national minorities that are less in number than the Roma and the Albanians. The reason lies in the already traditional economically disadvantaged position and education of the Roma, but significant issues are also faced by the members of Albanian national minority. One of the greatest obstacles is the lack of knowledge of the Croatian language as well as various prejudices (Sinoruka & Knezevic 2020).

The Reports suggest that in state administration and professional services and offices of the Government, the number of members of the Slovene minority also decreased (Table 3).

**Table 3: Number of Slovenes employed in state administration and professional services and offices of the Government, 2014–2021**

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of Slovenes employees	54	51	54	49	49	45	39	39	39	38	32
Total of national minorities employees	1,783	1,752	1,853	1,762	1,713	1,689	1,658	1,605	1,579	1,471	1,439

Source: GRC 2012; GRC 2013; GRC 2014; GRC 2015; GRC 2018; GRC 2019a; GRC 2019b; GRC 2021a; GRC 2021b; GRC 2022.

As shown by Table 3, there were 32 members of the Slovene minority employed in state administration in 2021. That number as well as the number shown in Table 2 are, however, questionable, as also the Report states that when applying for the job, some members of national minorities may not indicate their origin (GRC 2022, 48). Certain local self-governments (Pula, Zagreb) do not have any information about national minority employees (GRC 2022, 49). Evidently, some institutions cannot monitor the situation because there is no obligation to indicate nationality, which means that local and state institutions do not have a realistic picture about the members of national minorities they employ.

In some cases, also the members of the Slovene national minority employed in a state institution fail to indicate their nationality.<sup>5</sup> It is possible to conclude that the number of employees belonging to the Slovene minority is larger than shown here.

Some studies show that there are very specific prejudices that affect minorities on the labour market. There is a widespread perception that national minori-

ties enjoy certain advantages in employment and therefore the public thinks that discrimination of national minorities is not even an issue, especially because some important government positions are held by members of national minorities (Bakalović et al. 2013). In many cases, however, the members of national minorities are not aware of their guaranteed priority over other candidates of Croatian nationality when it comes to employment in state institutions.

The Croatian Employment Agency and the national Bureau of Statistics keep statistics on the state labour market but do not disaggregate them by ethnicity, even though they do so by other standards (age, level of education, gender). Although the Croatian Employment Agency does not request it, it has some data about citizenship of the unemployment persons. Below are the data as of 22 February 2023 (Table 4).

**Table 4: Number of the unemployed with Slovene citizenship**

Regional service	No.	Regional service	No.	Regional service	No.
Osijek	6	Čakovec	2	Pula	5
Rijeka	5	Dubrovnik	2	Sisak	2
Split	4	Kaloveac	1	Šibenik	3
Zagreb	4	Križevci	1	Virovitica	2
Bjelovar	2	Požega	1	Zadar	2
<b>Total</b>					<b>42</b>

Source: Communication by e-mail with T. Dragičević, Croatian Employment Service, 22 February 2023.<sup>6</sup>

These numbers are questionable because job applicants do not need to indicate whether they have Slovene or Croatian citizenship. Moreover, citizenship is not an indicator of their ethnic background as it is possible not to be members of the Slovene minority but still have Slovene citizenship.

Those Slovenes in Croatia who have dual citizenship are in a better position than other members of the Slovene minority in Croatia as well as other citizens of Croatia. They can be active on the labour market in both countries without any limits. Today, the situation is better than prior to Croatia entering the EU or before 2018 when Slovenia lifted the restrictions on employment (there is no need for work permits anymore) for Croats. During that period, Slovene citizenship was valuable for persons who lived near the border. Daily migrants had (and still have) better salaries. Some of them also had healthcare in Slovenia, which was good because the standard of healthcare in Slovenia was and still is higher than in Croatia, yet there is also the issue of remoteness – people do not have their physician in their place of residence but have to travel (sometimes for more than an hour). This was a significant issue during the COVID-19 pandemic when borders were closed and they could not go and see their physicians (Riman 2020b).

There is no data for other employment sectors (private) so it would be necessary to do research among the members of the Slovene national minority about their inclusion in the private labour market.

The research carried out among Slovene women in Croatia, mostly on the state labour market, shows that the factor of ethnic favouritism has an important impact. Women included in the research claimed that they had experienced no problems as their employers perceived them as valuable and effective workers – that perception is mainly based on generalisation and historical processes when many workers came to Croatia in search of work at the beginning and in the first half of the 20th century (Riman 2020a).

On the other hand, some had problems at the time of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia because they lost the possibility to work: they needed work permits but did not have all the necessary documents, some of them worked illegally. That is also related to the acquisition of Croatian citizenship. During the first few years after Croatia became independent, members of the Slovene national minority had to waive their Slovene citizenship. The Republic of Croatia never sent to Slovenia the documents they had signed, but those who had done so think that they do not have Slovene citizenship anymore. Hence, many of them decided to give up their Slovene background, stopped using the Slovene language and did not teach their children to speak Slovene. They are ashamed of their actions.<sup>7</sup> No specific research has been made on that issue. There are no data about how many people were affected by this phenomenon.

There is a lack of information and data about the position of the national minorities on the labour market. It is quite difficult to draw any conclusions and it is therefore necessary to do research among the members of national minorities, the Slovene national minority included. This raises some other issues, such as what methodology to use to collect adequate data for the topic presented here.

### 3.2 Education of Members of the Slovene National Minority

The rights pertaining to national minorities in Croatia include the preservation and learning of their mother tongue (minority language). The Croatian legislation in such regard is well developed. Minority language is taught in three basic models known as model A,<sup>8</sup> model B,<sup>9</sup> and model C,<sup>10</sup> in accordance with the constitutional and legal right to minority education.

Čorkalo Biruški et al. (2019) claim that minority education is not predominantly monoethnic, except for the Serb minority. In Istria, for example, Italian schools are also open to members of other minorities and the Croat majority (Paravina 2022). This confirms the findings of the research carried out among the members of the Slovene national minority in Croatia (Riman 2021b). In some parts of Croatia, attending a minority school, especially the one intended for the Italian minority, is a matter of prestige, which is related to the economic value of language. Not just Italian, there are also some other minority languages



in which the children's parents see economic value (Slovene, German). Hence, minority education in Croatia is not reserved solely for children belonging to a specific national minority.

According to the Reports, in the first few years following the adoption of the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities (2002), the number of children enrolled in some model of minority language learning increased (see Table 5).

However, even after twenty years, minority education is faced with challenges. When activities to assert the minorities' rights to education in their languages began, the Croatian government required that parents sign a statement demonstrating that their children were members of a national minority. That was one of the reasons why parents did not enrol children in the minority educational system.

**Table 5: Number of students included in the minority educational system between 2006/2007 and 2021/2022**

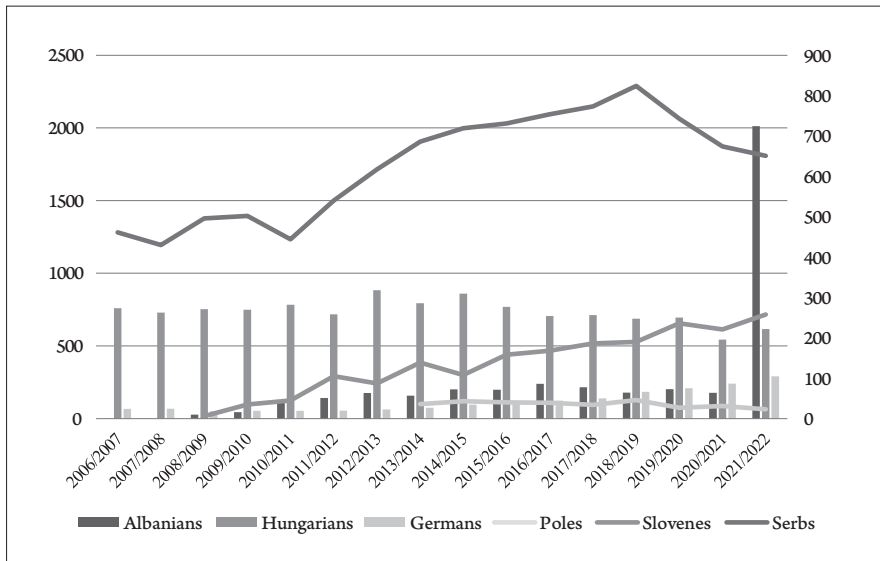
School Year	Model A	Model B	Model C	Total
2006/2007	4,411	13	2,317	6,741
2007/2008	4,425	14	2,289	6,728
2008/2009	4,417	14	2,387	6,818
2009/2010	4,271	11	2,453	6,735
2010/2011	3,832	8	2,527	6,367
2011/2012	5,722	67	2,788	8,527
2012/2013	5,437	67	3,235	8,739
2013/2014	5,296	88	3,351	8,735
2014/2015	5,225	95	3,556	8,896
2015/2016	5,093	72	3,498	8,663
2016/2017	5,076	90	3,590	8,753
2017/2018	4,961	92	3,652	8,706
2018/2019	4,652	89	3,731	8,241
2019/2020	4,659	87	3,796	8,543
2020/2021	4,675	73	3,482	8,215
2021/2022	4,644	51	3,654	8,349

Source: GRC 2007; GRC 2008; GRC 2009; GRC 2010; GRC 2011; GRC 2012; GRC 2013; GRC 2014; GRC 2015; GRC 2018; GRC 2019a; GRC 2019b; GRC 2021a; GRC 2021b; GRC 2022.

Table 5 reveals that the number of students in the first two models (model A and model B) decreased, while the number of those included in model C increased and remained at almost the same level. The reason for that is that model C evolved to include some new national minorities (Poles, Bosniaks). Because of a really small number of students in model B, the Ministry is considering re-voking that model.

The inclusion of selected national minorities in model C can be seen in Graph 2.

*Graph 2: Number of students included in model C between 2006/2007 and 2021/2022*



Source: GRC 2007; GRC 2008; GRC 2009; GRC 2010; GRC 2011; GRC 2012; GRC 2013; GRC 2014; GRC 2015; GRC 2018; GRC 2019a; GRC 2019b; GRC 2021a; GRC 2021b; GRC 2022.

The numbers of students vary for each national minority, depending on the reasons and issues that a national minority is faced with. Some of them are known from newspapers or conclusions of conducted research, while others are not immediately apparent. Therefore, it would be important to study those reasons and issues and collect (quantitative and qualitative) data. In some cases, it is also important to record the processes that cannot be recorded with quantitative methods of research.

The number of students mainly depends on the national minority itself – its efforts to promote minority language learning, its overall situation, as well as the majority’s opinion on that particular minority.

One of the issues that are also relevant for the Slovene national minority is the obsolete curriculum. In late 2022, the Croatian Ministry of Education published a call for the renewal of the curriculum for minority languages (the curriculum for the Slovene language has not change since its adoption in 2006) (MSE 2023). Another problem is the lack of educational materials for some national minorities (textbook shortages). Serbs and Italians have educational materials in their languages whereas Slovenes do not and are dependent on the Republic of Slovenia to assist them with free textbooks (Riman 2021b, 17). Once the curric-

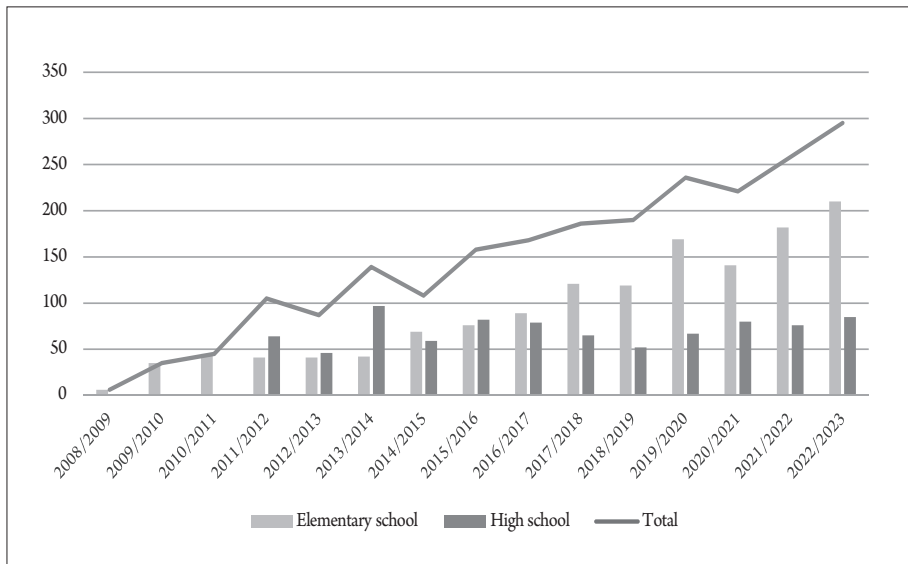
ulum is improved (2023/2024), it is likely that there will be some improvement also in the supply of educational materials. The third issue is segregation (Roma and Serbs), i.e. labelling on the basis of nationality. Some students who learn Slovene in schools are, for instance, called *Janezi*, which is a derogatory name for Slovenes. That term is used for students who attend Slovene language classes (Riman 2023). Finally, there is a lack of teachers. Some Slovene teachers are not properly qualified for that job. In two primary schools, Slovene is taught by a person with a major in maritime studies. The Bregana Primary School had been trying to find a teacher of Slovene for four months. Eventually, one was found among the private contacts of one of the members of the Slovene community (STA 2022; Bernik 2022). Another issue is the additional training opportunities for teachers of Slovene, which was mentioned also by the Committee of Experts in its sixth evaluation report on Croatia (Council of Europe 2022, 14). The report included a Recommendation for immediate action for pre-school education available in Slovene (Council of Europe 2022, 13).

In rural areas (Varaždin County and Gorski Kotar), the problem is weak public transportation coverage. In some cases, the problem is also the lack of schools where children could learn their mother tongue. This is the case of Rijeka, where there are many children who do not have the opportunity to learn Slovene in the school they attend because courses are offered in other schools and, given the busy schedule, they cannot afford to go to another school to attend a Slovene language class (Riman 2023).

The number of children learning Slovene in elementary and high school is shown in Graph 3. Graph 3 shows that the number of children learning Slovene increased. That is because the Slovene national minority has been trying to popularise the Slovene language and open classes in schools where Slovene is not yet taught. However, there are many bureaucratic procedures which additionally hamper school principals. The Slovene Ministry of Education has a key role in such regard by providing educational materials so that the parents do not have to bear additional costs.

The problem is that Croatia is a decentralised country when it comes to legislation and in many cases local authorities and principals of some schools (primary and secondary) need to approve the introduction of a certain minority right, for example learning the minority language. That is not always easy. In many cases there is no good will to accommodate the minorities' requests for the rights to which they are entitled. The school principals refuse to open a class for learning the minority language and culture, and the local political authority does not do anything to help the minority which is then left to figure things out on its own (Riman 2023). Minorities indeed have at least a theoretical possibility for their children to learn minority language, but such is not implemented in practice.

**Graph 3: Number of Slovene students in model C between 2008/2009 and 2021/2022**



Source: GRC 2007; GRC 2008; GRC 2009; GRC 2010; GRC 2011; GRC 2012; GRC 2013; GRC 2014; GRC 2015; GRC 2018; GRC 2019a; GRC 2019b; GRC 2021a; GRC 2021b; GRC 2022.

There have been some cases where school principals refused to conduct a survey to verify the interest in learning Slovene. In a small town near Rijeka (Lovran), the principal ignored the administrative letter of the Slovene community and its proposal to conduct a survey. After consulting the Ministry of Education, the representatives of the Slovene national minority in the Primorsko-Goranska County reported the case to the County authorities. The County's Department for Education did not help, they just asked the principal why she refused to do the survey. The principal's answer was that the survey was carried out orally among the children and that there was no interest in learning the Slovene language. This happened in 2019 and the situation has remained unchanged ever since (Riman 2022c). The Slovene national minority informed the Ministry of Education, the Department of Education of the Primorsko-Goranska County, the Ministry for Slovenes Abroad, but to no effect. Violations of the right to learning Slovene as a mother tongue and some other rights are frequent, but there is not a single institution willing to react and able to change the situation.

The national minority has tried to introduce Slovene language classes in some other schools, but sometimes there is no will and the minority is helpless. Principals fail to respond to its requests, there is no help from the local government.

## 4. Conclusion

The article illustrated some notable issues affecting the overall situation in the field of socioeconomic participation (inclusion) in Croatian society. As pointed out in previous studies, there is a lack of data that are relevant to better understand the socioeconomic position of the members of the Slovene national minority in Croatia. The lack of data is not symptomatic just for Slovene minority, but also for other minorities in Croatia and Europe alike.

The topic addressed herein does not seem to be of interest to researchers from Croatia, Slovenia (for the Slovene national minority in Croatia), or other European countries. Hitherto research only covers some national minorities in Croatia, like Roma and Serbs. For Roma, there is some socioeconomic data in Croatia and in various European countries. In Croatia, there is also some socioeconomic data for Serbs, because of the animosity arisen during the war between 1991 and 1995. For the other 20 national minorities in Croatia, there is very little data or none at all. One such minority is certainly the Slovene national minority.

The Slovene minority in Croatia is specific: no political involvement, no political parties, low media coverage, failure to exercise rights, no discrimination, no social vulnerability. Therefore, data is hard to find. The data presented herein is official government data. It was available only for the state labour market and not for the private sector, and for minority education. Other data is missing, there is no database, and it would be necessary – not only for the Slovene minority but also for others – to do some extensive research.

The data concerning the situation of members of the Slovene national minority in the Croatian labour market is scarce. As there is no obligation to indicate nationality, such data cannot be realistically confirmed. In fact, the number of employees with a Slovene background is quite likely to be higher.

Data relating to the number of students involved in Slovene language learning is real, but it is not known whether all of them are also members of the Slovene national minority. Some learn Slovene out of a purely economic interest (Riman 2021b) and have no other (family) relations to the Slovene community in Croatia or the State of Slovenia.

The Croatian legislation is well-designed, but it is difficult to implement it in practice. Some national minorities (Roma, Serbs) seem to face more (negative) inequalities than others, but only because other minorities are less visible and the majority population does not know that they, too, live in Croatia. For some of them, being invisible is an option because they are afraid of possible political inconveniences and complications that may affect their present status. This certainly holds true of the Slovene national minority, which seems to be fading.

There is no or little data about the overall position of national minorities. Hitherto studies suggest that members of national minorities are subject to various forms of prejudice. The members of the Slovene national minority rarely experience hate speech in public areas but are sometimes confronted with it in

private situations and at the individual level. Existing research also shows that the members of the Slovene minority often experience misunderstanding and non-implementation of their rights because of the fear of othering or just because of the ignorance of the people who are in the position to introduce certain rights. The area where progress is visible is education, namely the increase in the number of students learning Slovene and schools where Slovene is taught as a minority language.

For the future, it would be important to research and analyse the political, economic and social inequalities among national minorities in Croatia, with a special emphasis on the Slovene minority. Data in such regard is lacking, which makes research in this field relevant and necessary.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The old minorities were: Hungarians, Italian, Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenians, and Ukrainians (Tatalović 2001, 96).
- <sup>2</sup> Some of the Germans decided, upon retiring, to move to Croatia where they have their houses/vacation houses. The climate was also a factor, as well as the cost of living, which can be cheaper (Danas.hr 2022).
- <sup>3</sup> National minorities have eight representatives in the Croatian parliament, three for the Serbian national minority, one for the Hungarians, one for the Italians, one for the Slovaks and Czechs,

one for the Slovenes, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Bosnians and Albanians, and one is for the remaining minorities. Because of the small number of votes they obtain, there is also the problem of legitimacy (Stojanović 2017).

- <sup>4</sup> The first Report refers to 2003.
- <sup>5</sup> This information was provided by Slovene language teachers who, formally, are employees of the Croatian Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, as well as selected professors from Croatian faculties.
- <sup>6</sup> The source is kept by the author.
- <sup>7</sup> The information was provided by a woman who had some negative experience in acquiring Croatian citizenship.
- <sup>8</sup> In Model A, all lessons are taught in the language and script of the national minority with compulsory learning of Croatian.
- <sup>9</sup> Model B is a bilingual system in which social science subjects as well as minority-related subjects are taught in separate classes in the minority language and script.
- <sup>10</sup> Model C in principle covers five hours of language learning a week, along with literature, history, geography, music, and art pertaining to the minority language. This is the most widely applied model.

## Acknowledgement

The article is the result of the research programme group Ethnic and Minority Studies and the Slovene Studies (Slovene National Question) (P5-0081), funded by Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS).