



INŠTITUT ZA NARODNOSTNA VPRAŠANJA  
INSTITUTE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES



Funded by  
the European Union



2026

MINORITY  
STAKEHOLDERS  
FORUM  
POLICY BRIEF

# New Realities, Old Challenges: Safeguarding Minorities in 21st Century Slovenia

Ljubljana, July 2026

---

Edited by Dr. Noémi Nagy



## INTRODUCTION

On 28 May 2026, the Institute for Ethnic Studies hosted the first Minority Stakeholders Forum in Ljubljana as part of the EU-funded MINCOOP project. The Forum brought together representatives of minority communities, policy-makers, civil society actors, and researchers to discuss contemporary challenges relating to minority recognition, minority rights, and minority membership in Slovenia.

The Forum was motivated by a broader concern at the heart of the MINCOOP project: while international and domestic legal systems routinely refer to minorities, they rarely provide clear answers to two fundamental questions: *Which groups constitute a minority?* and *Who belongs to a minority?* These conceptual ambiguities have practical consequences for minority protection, public policy, and access to rights.

The Forum aimed to create a platform for dialogue among stakeholders with different experiences and perspectives, enhance cooperation and networking, generate knowledge, and identify minority community needs that may inform future policy discussions. The event was designed as an exploratory and non-adversarial exercise. Its purpose was not to achieve consensus, but rather to understand different viewpoints and identify areas of convergence and divergence.

This document summarizes the main findings emerging from the discussions and presents a set of stakeholder-informed policy recommendations. It does not necessarily reflect the views of all participants and should be regarded as a contribution to ongoing discussions on minority protection in Slovenia.

## THE FORUM METHODOLOGY

The Forum employed a participatory discussion format rather than traditional conference presentations. Participants worked in small mixed groups composed, as far as possible, of minority representatives, policy-makers, civil society actors, and experts. Each group was moderated by a researcher from the Institute for Ethnic Studies.



Discussions were structured around four guiding questions:

- **Who should be recognized as minorities in Slovenia?**
- **Why are only certain groups recognized and on what grounds?**
- **Should different minorities enjoy different rights?**
- **How should minority membership be defined?**

The discussions generated a wide range of perspectives. While some participants defended existing arrangements, others advocated significant reforms. Nevertheless, several recurring themes emerged across the groups.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

### **1. Minority Recognition: Beyond Autochthony?**

One of the most prominent themes concerned the role of *autochthony* in the Slovenian minority protection system.

Many participants questioned whether autochthony should remain the central criterion for minority recognition. Several groups argued that the concept is difficult to define consistently and may no longer adequately reflect contemporary social realities. Participants frequently suggested replacing or complementing it with the notion of *traditional* or *historical presence*.

There was broad agreement that the constitutionally recognized Italian and Hungarian national communities, as well as the Roma community, should retain their current status and rights. At the same time, many participants argued that additional historically rooted communities deserve greater recognition.

The communities most frequently mentioned were:

- the German-speaking community;
- the Jewish community;
- communities originating from the territory of the former Yugoslavia, particularly Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks, Macedonians, Montenegrins, and Albanians.

Participants emphasized different reasons for recognition, including historical presence, cultural distinctiveness, organized community life, contribution to Slovenian society, and the desire to preserve and transmit cultural heritage to future generations.

At the same time, participants acknowledged that minority recognition is not merely a legal question but also a political one. Several discussions highlighted the importance of political will and public support in shaping recognition policies.

Participants noted that legal recognition alone is insufficient if stereotypes and limited public awareness persist. Educational, cultural, and public-awareness initiatives should highlight the diversity of minority communities living in Slovenia and their contribution to society.

## **2. Different Communities, Different Needs**

Most groups rejected the idea that all minority communities necessarily require identical rights.

Participants generally supported a differentiated approach based on the specific needs and circumstances of each community. However, they also stressed the importance of maintaining equality and avoiding unjust hierarchies among minorities.

A recurring proposal was the establishment of a basic package of minority rights available to all recognized communities, combined with additional rights tailored to particular needs. Such rights could include support for language maintenance, cultural activities, education, media presence, political participation, or community development.

The discussions also revealed concerns about the implementation of existing rights. Participants repeatedly noted that legal guarantees alone are insufficient without effective monitoring, adequate funding, and institutional capacity.



Several groups pointed to discrepancies between legal provisions and practical implementation. Others emphasized the need for more systematic evaluation of minority policies and stronger oversight of public funding allocated to minority organizations.

The territorial dimension of minority rights also generated discussion. While participants generally supported maintaining territorial rights in areas of traditional minority settlement, many argued that certain rights—particularly cultural and linguistic rights—should also be accessible beyond those areas, throughout Slovenia, reflecting contemporary patterns of mobility and residence.

### **3. Defining Minority Membership**

Questions concerning minority membership proved equally complex.

Across the groups, self-identification emerged as the most important principle. Participants generally agreed that individuals should have the right to identify with a minority community and that this choice should be respected.

At the same time, many participants argued that the subjective criterion of self-identification alone may not always be sufficient. Additional (“objective”) factors discussed included:

- family background and ancestry;
- cultural affiliation;
- participation in community life;
- knowledge of the minority language;
- commitment to preserving the community's heritage.

Most participants emphasized that membership should be understood as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a rigid legal category.

The discussions also highlighted the growing importance of multiple identities. Participants noted that contemporary societies are characterized by mixed backgrounds, multilingualism, and overlapping affiliations. Future approaches to minority membership should therefore be flexible enough to accommodate multiple forms of belonging.



Privacy concerns were also raised. Participants stressed that individuals should never be pressured into declaring their ethnic affiliation and that any data collection concerning minority status should provide robust safeguards for privacy and confidentiality.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the discussions, the following recommendations emerged as priorities for future policy consideration:

### **Minority Recognition**

- 1.Reassess the role of autochthony as the primary criterion for minority recognition and explore complementary concepts such as historical or traditional presence.
- 2.Initiate an inclusive public and expert dialogue on the status of historically rooted communities that currently lack constitutional recognition.
- 3.Consider developing a more transparent framework for minority recognition based on clearly articulated statutory criteria.
- 4.Promote public awareness of Slovenia's minority diversity.

### **Minority Rights**

- 5.Maintain the existing level of protection enjoyed by constitutionally recognized minorities.
- 6.Develop a layered approach to minority protection: Establish a common minimum package of minority rights applicable to all recognized minority communities, at the same time, allow additional rights and support measures to be adapted to the specific needs and circumstances of individual communities.
- 7.Extend selected cultural, linguistic and educational rights beyond traditional settlement areas.
- 8.Develop clearer monitoring mechanisms, regular evaluations, and stronger accountability procedures to ensure that minority rights are effectively implemented.



## **Institutions and Governance**

9. Increase institutional capacity and resources dedicated to minority affairs, including coordination among relevant public bodies. Specifically, strengthen the institutional capacity of the Office for Nationalities.
10. Explore new forms of minority representation in public decision-making at local, regional, and national levels.
11. Provide institutional and financial support for regular structured dialogue between minority communities, public authorities, civil society organizations, and researchers (such as the Minority Stakeholders Forum).

## **Minority Membership**

12. Preserve self-identification as the cornerstone of minority membership while allowing communities to define complementary criteria of belonging (for example, cultural participation, community ties, family background, and language knowledge).
13. Ensure that future census and data-collection mechanisms permit the expression of multiple identities and affiliations.
14. Strengthen safeguards protecting privacy and preventing pressure or discrimination related to ethnic self-identification.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Minority Stakeholders Forum demonstrated the value of bringing together diverse actors in a structured environment for dialogue on minority issues. Participants represented different communities, professional backgrounds, institutional roles, and personal experiences. While significant disagreements remained on several questions, the discussions revealed substantial common ground regarding the need for effective minority protection, meaningful participation, and continued dialogue.



The Forum confirmed that questions of minority recognition, minority rights, and minority membership remain highly relevant in contemporary Slovenia. At the same time, it highlighted the importance of approaching these issues in a manner that is inclusive, evidence-based, and responsive to changing social realities.

The recommendations presented in this brief should be understood as a starting point for further discussion rather than definitive solutions. The organizers hope that the Minority Stakeholders Forum will become a regular platform for dialogue and contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective minority policies in Slovenia.

## **KEY MESSAGES**


**(1) Participants broadly supported maintaining existing minority rights while exploring recognition mechanisms for additional historically rooted communities.**

**(2) The concept of autochthony remains contested and may require reconsideration.**

**(3) Minority protection should combine common minimum standards with additional community-specific measures.**

**(4) Self-identification remains the cornerstone of minority membership, but multiple identities should receive greater recognition.**

**(5) Stronger implementation, monitoring, and institutional capacity are needed to make minority protection more effective.**



© Institut for Ethnic Studies  
Erjavčeva 26, SI-1000 Ljubljana  
+386 (1) 200 18 72  
inv@inv.si



**MINORITY  
STAKEHOLDERS  
FORUM  
POLICY BRIEF**