Ana Cvelfar, Aleš Rojc, Živa Šketa,
Nastja Tomat, Marja Zakelšek

Organising Attempts With Migrant Workers in Slovenia

A Case Study of the Class Composition in a Retail Warehouse

Povzetek

Poskusi organiziranja z migrantskimi delavci v Sloveniji: študija primera razredne sestave v maloprodajnem skladišču

V prispevku predstavimo operaistično so-raziskovanje kot metodo delavskega organiziranja v centralnem skladišču enega največjih maloprodajnih podjetij v Sloveniji, pri čemer se posebej osredotočamo na izkušnje migrantskih delavcev. Izhajali bomo iz naših izkušenj delavskega organiziranja v maloprodaji v okviru kolektiva Cedra in izpostavili nujnost in ovire za organiziranje (migrantskih) delavcev v maloprodajnih skladiščih. Na podlagi polstrukturiranih intervjujev s tremi migrantskimi delavci, ki delajo v omenjenem skladišču, je v članku opisan delovni proces na tem delovnem mestu. Ugotavljamo, da je vse večje število migrantskih delavcev v skladiščih maloprodajnih podjetij spremenilo tehnično in politično sestavo delovne sile v maloprodaji. Prek primerjave preteklih in sedanjih oblik izkoriščanja delovne sile poskušamo pokazati, da so se sicer spremenili sektorji in demografija migrantskih delavcev, vendar strategije kapitala za fragmentacijo delovne sile ostajajo enake. Za organiziranje migrantskih delavcev, ki trenutno delajo v Sloveniji, predlagamo kombinacijo različnih do sedaj uporabljenih pristopov: v članku primerjamo so-raziskovalno metodo Cedre v maloprodajnih sindikatih z drugimi oblikami organiziranja in samoorganiziranja migrantskih delavcev, kot so Nevidni delavci sveta. Zaključimo s predstavitvijo trenutnih dejavnosti kolektiva Razredni broj, ki

vključujejo individualno pravno pomoč migrantskim delavcem in izdajo delavskega glasila. Te aktivnosti delujejo kot politična intervencija, namenjena gradnji solidarnosti in kolektivne moči.

Ključne besede: migrantsko delo, delavska raziskava, Razredni broj, skladišča, sestava delavskega razreda, maloprodaja

Nastja Tomat je članica kolektiva Razredni broj. E-naslov: nastja.tomat@gmail.com

Živa Šketa je članica kolektiva Razredni broj. E-naslov: sketaziva@gmail.com

Marja Zakelšek je članica kolektiva Razredni broj. E-naslov: marja.zakelsek@gmail.com

Ana Cvelfar je članica kolektiva Razredni broj. E-naslov: ana.cvelfar@gmail.com

Aleš Rojc je član kolektiva Razredni broj. E-naslov: rojc.ales@gmail.com

Abstract

The article presents the specificities of migrant workers' labour organising in present-day Slovenia. The authors use *operaist* co-research (*conricerca*) as a praxis of labour organising and analysing the class composition of migrant workers in a warehouse at one of the biggest retail companies in Slovenia. Drawing on their experience with *operaist* co-research in organising retail workers, the authors point out the need for and challenges with organising (migrant) workers in retail warehouses. Based on semi-structured interviews with three migrant workers in this retail warehouse, the article describes the labour process at their workplace. We show that an increasing share of migrant workers in warehouses has changed the political and technical composition of retail workers. Drawing parallels between past and present forms of labour exploitation of workers, we argue that while sectoral contexts and migrant demographics have changed, capital's strategies of labour fragmentation remain the same. We call for a combined approach to organising migrant workers in contemporary Slovenia: we compare the use of co-research by the Cedra collective in retail workers' trade unions, to other forms of labour organising and migrant workers' self-organising, such as the Invisible Workers of the World. We conclude with presenting the ongoing activities of Class Issue collective, which include individual legal support for migrant workers and the publication of a workers' bulletin. These activities function as a political intervention aimed at building solidarity and collective power.

Keywords: migrant work, co-research, Class Issue, warehouses, class composition, retail

Nastja Tomat is a member of the Class Issue Collective. Email: nastja.tomat@gmail.com
Živa Šketa is a member of the Class Issue collective. Email: sketaziva@gmail.com
Marja Zakelšek is a member of the Class Issue collective. Email: marja.zakelsek@gmail.com
Ana Cvelfar is a member of the Class Issue collective. Email: ana.cvelfar@gmail.com
Aleš Rojc is a member of the Class Issue collective. Email: rojc.ales@gmail.com

Every collective struggle has to start by understanding current conditions and how to change them, and co-research is one approach that makes this process explicit (Hughes & Woodcock, 2023). This article describes how we use this practice in our ongoing inquiry with migrant workers in Slovenia.

First, we will discuss why we decided to start an inquiry into the situation of migrant workers at the distribution centre of one of the biggest retailers in Slovenia, and briefly describe the labour process at the distribution centre where our co-research began. We will demonstrate how an ever-increasing proportion of migrant workers within Slovenia's total workforce is reshaping the technical composition of employees in one of the most important service sectors, which is crucial for the reproduction of the working class in the private sector—retail.

We will continue with a short critical evaluation of Slovenia's largest trade union confederation's attempts to include migrant workers in its activities. Since 2011, Slovenia's trade unions have established a specific approach to migrant work that they still rigorously practice today: a consulting/info office where (migrant) workers can receive free legal aid and consulting, or pay a symbolic monthly membership fee. Lawyers and professional consultants who work in these offices then use the information from solving individual cases in public campaigns and media appearances to advocate for (migrant) workers' rights and raise public awareness about the living conditions of 'invisible' workers.

In the next section, we will demonstrate that an alternative approach to organising with migrant workers has persisted and been practised in Slovenia since the 1990s, throughout almost the entire history of post-socialist Slovenia. This includes the self-organisation of 'erased citizens' (izbrisani), migrant workers from former Yugoslav countries, organising amid the economic crisis in the years between 2007 and 2014, and organising of asylum-seekers arriving via the Balkan route that started in 2015, the latter of which is still active today with the Infokolpa collective.

We will highlight the continuity of the struggle of some activists who first organised as migrant construction workers during the economic crisis, later helped organise with irregular migrants, and are now assisting the Class Issue collective with our attempts to organise with migrant workers by sharing their knowledge, experiences, infrastructure, and community space. This will be

achieved through a somewhat longer summary of the work of the Invisible Workers of the World (IWW) collective.

We compare the technical composition identified by the IWW in their co-research with migrant workers in 2010 with that which we are uncovering in our own co-research today. Our findings demonstrate that the strategies employed by capital to super exploit migrant workers through their unequal legal status have remained unchanged for 15 years. Since 2010, the following have changed:

(1) the sectors in which most migrant workers are employed;

(2) the high fees that migrant workers must pay to recruitment agencies for work permits, and the personal debt that this creates;

(3) the much greater distance between Slovenia and the migrants' countries of origin, which often makes it impossible for them to return if they can no longer survive in the EU.

In conclusion, we present our work as the Class Issue collective, which is grounded at the intersection of shop floor organising within the most important sectors and companies for Slovenian society, and a community project involving a worker-to-worker and migrant-to-migrant helpline for individual cases of migrant workers whose lives and futures have been ruined by their employers across all sectors. By helping them survive in Slovenia, we hope to establish a safe and strong community capable of taking on class struggles in strategic sectors.

Workers' inquiry and its use in Cedra

In some Marxist currents, starting with Marx's own survey (Hoffman, 2019; McAllister, 2022; Woodcock, 2014), workers' inquiry combines knowledge production and organising by aiming "to increase knowledge of workers' situations in order to advance their leverage and power" (McAllister, 2022). In the 1960s, Italian operaists introduced the concept of 'class composition' to describe the relationship between knowledge and politics. This was in response to more traditional Marxist approaches to organising class struggle, specifically the concept of 'class consciousness', which they saw as too abstract and ignorant of the specific forms of capitalist production (Mohandesi, 2013). Put simply, class composition examines the relationship between the material structure of the working class (technical composition) and historical organisational forms of the working class (political composition). More specifically, technical composition refers to actual working conditions but is not confined to direct production Related to the workplace, it also encompasses the daily maintenance of the labour force,

ensuring its readiness to re-enter the labour process the following day. (Mohandesi, 2013). It can also be defined as the historical forms of subordinating the labour-force to the demands of capital, as specific methods of managing and fragmenting the labour-force (Bembič, 2018). Political composition is related to workers' attempts to break with the technical composition. More specifically, it refers to the workers' specific forms of resistance, which emerge from the technical composition. Both terms originate from the inquiries of early Italian operaists, but were given more historical and theoretical elaboration in Sergio Bologna's text on the German workers' council movement (Bologna, 1972).

Most authors of this article and members of the Class Issue collective first became involved in workers' inquiry as a praxis of labour organising through their participation in Cedra (Centre for Social Research). Cedra was established in 2016, emerging from the popular uprisings that took place across Slovenia between 2012 and 2014, in response to the government's handling of the worsening economic crisis. The initial idea behind Cedra was to support workers' organising across various sectors and to build organic connections with workers, to build a political organisation (for a more detailed history, see Cvelfar et al., 2025). The objective was to revitalise the trade union movement by introducing organising methods that emphasise democratic union committees, collective decision-making, and the active involvement of union members. From 2021 to early 2025, Cedra was most active in the retail sector.[1] It helped to establish an internal opposition within the existing service-oriented sectoral union (SDTS, the Trade Union of Workers in the Trade Sector). This union recruits members who pay membership fees but are otherwise passive, and employs lawyers to bargain with the companies on behalf of the workers (Cvelfar et al., 2025).

Cedra's approach to workers' inquiry was most influenced by the Italian Marxist current *operaismo* (workerism) (e.g., Alquati, 2013; Hoffman, 2019) as well as reworkings of operaist methods and concepts locally in Slovenia (e.g. Bembič, 2018; Močnik, 2011; Kurnik, 2009) and globally (e.g. Mohandesi, 2013; Notes from Below, 2018). In the late 2010s and early 2020s, Cedra analysed the class composition in contemporary Slovenia and concluded that the capital's pressure on social reproduction is the most significant in the service sector. One way to increase surplus value and profits is to reduce the value of the workforce by lowering the prices of goods and services necessary for its reproduction. Since most services for the reproduction of the workforce cannot be provided from other locations where companies move their operations to exploit a lower-value workforce, the price of goods and services can be lowered by reducing the value of the workforce in reproduction industries (Cedra, 2019). We concluded

1 See, for example, https://www.cedra.si/en/our-three-year-struggle.

that the political nature of labour exploitation was the most obvious from the viewpoint of (mostly female) retail workers (Cvelfar et al., 2025). Based on this preliminary analysis of Slovenia's labour force composition, Cedra focused on organising company-level unions for retail workers at Lidl, Tuš, and Spar. Using the co-research method, we co-created knowledge about the working and living conditions of retail workers, developing an organising strategy that connected economic demands with the political nature of exploitation.

Our organising strategy with Cedra did not bring union structures closer to retail workers who are not permanently employed and/or do not hold permanent residency in Slovenia. With the percentage of outsourced, agency, and migrant workers in the total workforce increasing (Bembič & Stanojević, 2016; Breznik, 2024), this has become an increasingly important organising issue. This is not only because some retail workers are excluded, but also because their disadvantaged position impacts the ability of all workers to exercise their right to collective action. For example, during preparations for the one-day strike in the Tuš shops in December 2023, the company threatened to keep the shops open on strike day by using agency and student workers. The central warehouse, which has the highest percentage of outsourced and migrant workers, would also operate as if it were a normal business day.

To enable and encourage migrants and other precariously employed workers to organise at work, significant changes to union infrastructure and organising tactics were required. For example, anonymous and informal membership would have to be encouraged, cross-sectoral organising should be possible, and union confederations would have to systematically address the political and social problems of single residence and work permits that are tied to employers, as well as living conditions in migrant workers' dormitories. Sectoral union of retail workers (SDTS) and Cedra, however, deemed migrant workers as 'unorganisable' and stuck to the strategy of putting all the efforts into organising regularly employed workers, hoping that they would also advocate for the rights of their precariously employed colleagues.

Why a retail distribution centre?

Cedra's practical approach to labour organising involved activists entering a workplace in the retail sector through existing trade union infrastructure, thus organising retail workers for economic demands, and learning about the technical and political composition in the retail sector (Cvelfar et al., 2025). With Cedra focusing primarily on workers in retail shops, the question of warehouses

that supply the items to these shops was already implicit. While the workers in retail warehouses did attempt to organise at their workplace, there was either never a break-through or when there was one (in the Tuš warehouse in the end of 2022), the management took extreme anti-union measures of firing multiple permanent-contract workers and replacing them with agency workers. The question of various legal forms of employment became especially pertinent when Cedra activists were preparing for a strike with the Tuš union, where the fact that students, outsourced workers and agency workers are in more precarious legal positions became an obstacle to carrying out a successful strike action. In this case, the right to strike was narrowed down to regularly employed workers, which in turn made the action of a strike an unreliable tool to actually stop the work. These experiences showed us that we need to thoroughly examine and intervene into the situation in the warehouses as well.

The opportunity to enter the central warehouse of one of Slovenia's biggest retailers came quite by coincidence. One of the authors lives near migrant workers' dormitories and noticed that many of the workers there were from South Asian countries. This is relatively new for Slovenia, where most migrant workers come from other ex-Yugoslav countries (Kanduč & Ručman, 2016; Pajnik et al., 2010). We decided to take a few of our worker's bulletins and talk with them and that is how we found out that many of them were from Kerala, India, and worked at the same distribution centre. After meeting with some workers individually, we conducted semi-structured interviews with three workers. These interviews focused primarily on finding out about the working conditions in the warehouse, living conditions at the dormitories and their migration to Slovenia.

The next part of the article will present a case study of the warehouse's technical composition of its labour force. While some characteristics are specifically tied to this particular warehouse, they reveal *a general trend of systematically introducing migrant labour with precarious characteristics into sectors where workers as individuals are powerless, while the workers' collectives as a whole hold significant structural power* (Cillo & Pradella, 2018; Alyanak et al., 2023; Cini & Goldmann, 2020). The introduction of migrant labour with precarious characteristics is one of capital's ways of breaking with the existing political composition of the working class.

The labour process in a retail warehouse

The work in the retail warehouse is distinctly divided. While the warehouse stores products sold exclusively by one retail company, operationally, it is split into two areas referred to as the 'wet' and 'dry' parts. The wet part is managed by the retail company, which directly employs Slovenian and migrant workers to handle fresh produce, including fruit, vegetables, meat, and dairy products. The dry part is larger and has been outsourced to another logistics company. It is primarily staffed by migrant workers from India and Nepal who handle items such as beverages, cleaning supplies, dry food, and pet food.

The work and technology used in both parts of the warehouse are essentially the same. The core tasks involve scanning items to detail orders, placing them into trolleys or onto pallets, and managing the associated documentation. This is largely a manual process that requires significant physical labour, including lifting, pushing, and pulling heavy loads. During the week, the warehouse operates 24 hours a day, across three rotating shifts (morning, afternoon, night). Shifts rotate weekly, potentially disrupting workers' sleep cycles. On Saturdays, the warehouse operates with a morning shift only. Other weekend shifts, including Sunday night shifts, are scheduled during periods of high demand, such as the December holidays. Overtime is compensated with free days rather than payment. Workers can be sent home early due to a lack of orders, and these hours are then deducted from their accumulated plus hours.

Workers' productivity is measured by daily or monthly targets, or 'norms'. To meet these demanding targets, many workers start their shifts up to 30 minutes early, effectively working unpaid. Meeting the target is also challenging due to fluctuating order sizes; smaller, more diverse orders take more time than larger, more uniform ones. Workers also lose time waiting for products. One worker said, "The people who made these rules never had to do what we do".

These racialised divisions are evident, for example, in access to promotions and skilled roles such as forklift operator or shift manager, which are offered to local and former Yugoslav workers. During slow periods, easier, non-standardised tasks are generally assigned to Slovenian and ex-Yugoslav workers. Workers who are not reassigned to non-normed tasks during slow periods have to reach the same target as in busier periods. However, this target is much harder to meet during slow periods, as there are fewer orders or fewer products in the warehouse. Workers report that they are sometimes unable to reach the target because there are no more items left to pick. From the perspective of South Asian workers, being reassigned to non-normed tasks during slow periods is a privilege unattainable to them.

In terms of technology, the labour process is mostly manual. The picking process and manual movement of items are central to the work carried out in the warehouse. Workers use barcode scanners to scan orders and track their progress towards daily and monthly targets. They use forklifts to move the items within the warehouse. The system for assigning orders is allegedly mostly automated, although workers we interviewed believe it is manipulated and based on the personal relationship with the management. The extreme physical demands of the job lead to widespread health problems, including chronic back pain, spinal issues, and torn ligaments. "It's like going to war, not to work", one of the workers told us. For migrant workers with a single work and residence permit, which ties the legality of their residence to their employment contract, and who do not have permanent contracts, these physical strains are accompanied by constant pressure to meet the norm, since the renewal of the contract is otherwise unlikely, and in any case uncertain.

All the South Asian workers in this warehouse who are staying in Slovenia with a single permit came here from Kerala, northern India, or Nepal through 'recruitment agencies'. These agencies are not the workers' employers; they only mediate between the worker and the employers. There are no specific regulations governing these agencies in Slovenia. They charge companies and sometimes workers for intermediary services, i.e., they capitalise on these workers' lack of knowledge of the Slovenian language, legislation, and connections. South Asian workers pay high fees to recruiters in their home countries who are connected to agencies in Slovenia to secure an employment contract, which is required to obtain a work permit in Slovenia. The numbers mentioned in the conducted interviews range from 6.000 to 10.000 euros. Most workers borrowed money from friends and relatives and arrived in Slovenia with already a couple of thousand euros of debt.

While the agency that recruited workers from the countries mentioned above misrepresented many things, such as the difference between gross and net salary, as well as the details of the accommodation, the main issue that the workers we formally interviewed mentioned when asked about the differences between what they were promised and how the agency represented the work in Slovenia, and how it actually turned out, was the target system (norms). As it is almost impossible to meet the target consistently, workers are under constant pressure, fearing that a warning will result in dismissal or that their one-year contract will not be renewed.

Warehouse management uses a three-month probationary period to assess whether workers can achieve their daily and monthly targets; those who cannot are dismissed. Workers from Kerala, for example, described how they were initially the only ones working in the warehouse. Still, after some were fired, the

company started recruiting new workers from Nepal and the northern parts of India. After being fired, these workers lose the basis for their residency permits, and, if they do not find a new employer fast enough, their visas can be cancelled at any time. Since returning to their countries of origin is often not an option due to substantial debt, legislation tying their permit to valid employment practically forces workers to accept any conditions. Meanwhile, companies can constantly hire and fire workers, creating a 'reserve army of labour' (see, for example, Farris, 2017: 150–157).

Migrant workers and trade unions in Slovenia

Trade unions in the retail sector reinforce these global divisions of the labour force. For example, the sectoral union of retail workers (Sindikat delavcev trgovine Slovenije, abb. SDTS) only organised the 'retail' part of the warehouse (operated by the retail company), not the outsourced part (operated by the logistics company), which is considered to be 'part of the logistics sector'. This also means that different collective bargaining agreements cover the two segments of warehouse workers. The sectoral union of retail workers does not question this division of the warehouse labour force. At the same time, however, trade unions in the retail sector organise regularly employed workers separately from migrant and other precarious workers. For example, an SDTS union representative mentioned their union's position on precarious workers in an interview, how in retail shops precarious workers, and students in particular, are "welcome as someone who can ease the burden ... we go along with those fixed term jobs to relieve other regular employees in the retail sector." (Bembič and Stanojević, 2016)

The existing trade unions in Slovenia have a completely service-based approach to migrant work. Because migrant workers often face problems not directly connected to the workplace, such as administrative problems with their permits or bad living conditions in worker's accommodations, in 2011, the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS), the largest national trade union confederation in Slovenia, established an external body to support migrant workers – the Labour Counselling Service (Delavska svetovalnica), which is not a union and which now runs independently (Panariti, 2024). ZSSS currently employs one expert associate for migration, but its approach remains focused on individual cases rather than encouraging migrant workers to join existing unions. The only instrument to counter the exploitation seems to be a reactive one, i.e., reporting abuses to the judiciary (Panariti, 2024). This was the case in 2023, when the Slovenian Labour Inspectorate discovered that 138

posted workers in Tuš retail company, mostly with citizenship in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia, did not have obligatory health insurance (that every employer must provide for his workers). These workers worked for more than 200 hours per month. The situation was left completely to the domain of the Labour Inspectorate and did not become a union issue.

Invisible Workers of the World (IWW) today

Other approaches to organising migrant workers in Slovenia were critical of the trade union approach outlined above. The most notable of these was the Invisible Workers of the World (IWW) movement. As Kurnik (2009) wrote 16 years ago, existing unions and union confederations address migrant and other precarious workers through identity politics. For example, they write statements, hold press conferences, and declare themselves to be anti-imperialist and against precarious work arrangements and gender discrimination. However, they make no effort to adjust their organisational structures and organising tactics to open up unions to non-Slovenian and non-permanently employed workers. An example of this approach's less humanitarian side was seen during the 2008 economic crisis, when union confederations supported reducing the number of work permits issued to non-EU foreign workers. They advocated increasing temporary, more precarious working visas (such as posted and seasonal work visas) and decreasing single work permits. With that move, unions tried to protect the jobs of their (Slovenian) members. However, they faced a demonstration by migrant workers, who make up the majority of the workforce in sectors such as construction, as this new quota system worsened their working conditions and made them even more dependent on their employer. So, instead of uniting the working class in the wake of the economic crisis, unions reinforced the division between the well-protected domestic workforce and precarious workers. By acting against migrant workers, they failed to organise and relocated the conflict between capital and labour to one between the various strata of the working class (for more details, see *Izjava proti novi uredbi o kvoti delovnih dovoljenj za tuje delavce* and Hakimova, 2009).

The IWW took a different approach. In 2007, local activists first established contact with migrant workers, mostly from other former Yugoslav countries, when they distributed leaflets about upcoming trade union-organised demonstrations in workers' dormitories in Ljubljana (Beznec, 2017). The workers they met complained about their living conditions. There were 30–40 people living on one floor, sharing one kitchen and two bathrooms. There were no communal areas for

socialising, and the dormitories were not sufficiently heated in winter (Vinčić, 2013). Workers and activists began meeting at workers' assemblies at the dormitories and almost all the residents attended these meetings (Hakimova, 2009).

The activists described this as the beginning of co-research with migrant workers in Slovenia. The objective of this activist research was to produce knowledge that was relevant to migrant workers. The political potential of migrant workers was examined through the introduction of the concept of 'subjective composition', which the IWW used to refer to the autonomy of migration. As described by Mezzadra (2011), on whose writings the group heavily relied, exploring migrant labour through the lens of the autonomy of migration means examining migratory movements and conflicts in terms that prioritise the subjective practices, desires, expectations, and behaviours of the migrants themselves. The broader concept of the 'objective composition' of migrant labour replaced the technical composition concept. By this, IWW members mainly referred to the legal regime of control and exploitation of migrant labour (Kurnik, 2009).

The co-research method of the Invisible Workers of the World collective revealed that migrant workers in contemporary Slovenia are trapped in a complex system of single residence and work permits that make workers completely dependent on their employers (Beznec, 2017). One of the main demands of IWW was therefore that all migrant workers should immediately (i.e., upon entry into the country) get a personal work permit in Slovenia, which would allow them to change employers without having to go through the administrative procedure again (Vinčić, 2013). Together with Bosnian workers, IWW posed this demand to the Ministry of Labour during a hunger strike of 11 Bosnian workers in 2010. These workers went on strike after their employer, a construction company Prenova, did not pay their salaries for several months. After the negotiations with the Ministry failed, the strikers, together with IWW activists, decided to continue the hunger strike at the Ministry building. After pressures from the public and because of the worsening of workers' health, the Ministry granted personal work permits and financial aid to all the striking workers the next day. The IWW also established contact with Bosnian workers who had returned to Bosnia and did not strike, encouraging them to apply for aid from the Slovenian state (Beznec, 2017).

More than ten years later, our analysis of the current situation of migrant labour in Slovenia revealed that migrant workers still face the same system of single residence and work permits, which makes them completely dependent on their employers. Indian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, and Filipino workers are unable to report abuses by their employers because their residence and work permits are linked to a valid employment contract. This system enables Slovenian companies to exploit workers' dependence in various ways. For example,

two workers from Bangladesh explained that they had received a residence and work permit based on a contract with a Slovenian fast-food restaurant. However, when they arrived in Slovenia in January 2025, the company informed them that they currently do not need any workers. The recruiter promised to find them new jobs and, after some time, provided them with information sheets for a different company. While they were working for this company, one of the workers tried to enrol in a language course at the administrative unit, where they were informed that his permit was being cancelled. The information sheet the company had given him was fake, meaning he was working without the necessary documents or his employer's insurance. This is how companies manage the legal status of their workers' stay in the EU.

For comparison, here is a paragraph from an interview with Armin Salihović, a Bosnian worker active in the IWW, conducted in 2019:

> *[Ramo] Dervišević worked in Slovenia believing that he was working legally, as he had a seasonal work permit and an employment contract signed by his employer. In fact, he was not registered anywhere, he worked and lived here illegally. [...] His employer gave him a fake contract to make him think that his status in Slovenia was in order. Ramo believed him. He realized that something was wrong when inspectors came to the construction site and his employer hid him from them. (Hakimova, 2009)*

The objective composition of migrant workers' reproduction has also not changed since the 2010s. Most of the migrant workers we met are staying in a 'hostel' for migrant workers in Ljubljana near the BTC logistics centre. For most of them, accommodation and employment were arranged by the same recruitment agency registered in Slovenia. This is how one of the residents describes the living conditions in the dormitories:

> *We live in a small room, three people. The room [costs] 190 EUR for [each], so it's 570 EUR for one room. But [all you get] is a room. [There is] no fridge in the rooms [...]. The main problem is the kitchen [...] it closes at 10 p.m. It's difficult [to access the kitchen] after my work [...] at 8 or 9 p.m., there is a huge rush. [Around] 200 people live here. There are only two kitchens, [...]. There are six burners, but only two or three are okay and the rest sometimes don't work. [...] If I go to make some rice, I wait for like 30–40 minutes for the stove to be free. (interview with migrant worker Siraj, 2025, author's archive)*

There is no washing machine, so workers have to wash their clothes by hand. There is also no freezer, and the shared fridge is small, so workers have to buy groceries frequently. Some workers also described being woken up by their roommates working different shifts, and having to wait in line with other workers to use the communal bathroom.

Class Issue's co-research with migrant workers

In the Class Issue collective, we started using the method of co-research to help organise migrant workers in Slovenia in late 2024. As this article shows, our starting point is not the worker's position in the circuit of production versus reproduction (as was the case with our previous feminist co-research project with female retail workers, see Cvelfar et al., 2025), but the migrant worker's position in the circuit of production versus their unequal legal position as non-EU citizens. That is, our politicizing efforts emphasize their legal inequality, which lays bare the highly political position of a migrant worker – it is the legal and administrative obstacles which make their position on the labour market specific.

Our first contacts start through establishing interpersonal connections and maintaining a support and solidarity network, where solving individual legal issues is a rule, not an exception. This also demands some level of legal expertise out of all of us (as we all together learn it case by case), and a lot of time and resources to help the migrant workers achieve the bare minimum – to stay and survive in Slovenia. What sounds like a classic bureaucratic, service-oriented union approach is in this case our starting point in our politicising and organising efforts. Through legal advice, interpersonal relationships, and material help, we learn about the technical composition and therefore possible political composition of the migrant workforce. This is where our operaist co-research, specific and concrete, begins.

Our method also includes the use of the *Class Issue/Razredni broj* bulletin as a tool for political organising: the bulletin publishes workers' writings, and we are currently preparing an issue with migrant workers. By helping migrant workers with their legal problems, we also collected a set of useful legal information: so, the next Class Issue will combine workers' writing with legal information relevant for migrant workers in Slovenia. While the preparation of the third issue of Class Issue may not seem connected to workplace organising, and the legal information was prepared by solving individual cases, the issue was prepared with the aim of:

1) researching how to approach workers who have just started working in the Slovenian retail sector, figuring out what information might be helpful to them, and establishing contact; and

2) building trust amongst the migrant community and encouraging them to join our organisation, which focuses on workplace organising that includes migrant workers.

The third issue of Class Issue will therefore be used to approach migrant workers across various sectors in Slovenia.

Literature

Alquati, Romano (2013): *Organic Composition of Capital and Labor-Power at Olivetti (1961)*. Available from: https://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/27/organic-composition-of-capital-and-labor-power-at-olivetti-1961/ (30 June 2025).

Alyanak, Oğuzm Cant, Callum, López Ayala, Tatiana, Badger, Adan and Graham, Mark (2023): Platform work, exploitation, and migrant worker resistance: Evidence from Berlin and London. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 34(4): 667–688.

Bembič, Branko (2018): From victory to victory to the final retreat: Changing balance of class forces in the Slovenian transition. *Tiempo Devorado* (2): 363–398.

Bembič, Branko and Stanojević, Miroslav (2016): *The Rise of the Dual Labour Market: Fighting Precarious Employment in the New Member States Through Industrial Relations (PRECARIR) Country Report: Slovenia*. Central European Labour Studies Institute Available from: https://ideas.repec.org/p/cel/report/14.html (27 June 2025).

Beznec, Barbara (2017): Od Mreže za stalni obisk do Nevidnih delavcev sveta. Kratka zgodovina migrantskih gibanj v Rogu, 2006–2011. Časopis *za kritiko znanosti* 45(270): 60–73.

Bologna, Sergio (1972): Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the Workers-Council Movement. *Telos* (13): 4–27.

Breznik, Maja (2024): *Sustainable and socially just transnational sectoral labour markets for temporary migrants - Background report Slovenia.* Ljubljana: Mirovni inštitut/ Peace Institute. Available from: https://celsi.sk/media/datasource/JUSTMIG_ Background_Report_-_Slovenia.pdf (27 June 2025).

Cedra (2019): *Organic intellectuals at points of rupture of the technical composition of the workforce*. Available from: https://www.cedra.si/en/en-quaderni (27 June 2025).

Cedra (2024): *Our three-year struggle*. Available from: https://www.cedra.si/en/our-three-year-struggle (27 June 2025).

Cillo, R., & Pradella, L. (2018). New immigrant struggles in Italy's logistics industry. *Comparative European Politics* 16(1): 67–84.

Cini, Lorenzo and Goldmann, Bartek (2020): Dal controllo alla mobilitazione. Le lotte dei ciclofattorini e dei facchini della logistica in Italia. *Labour & Law Issues*, 6(1): 1–34.

Cvelfar, Ana, Šketa, Živa and Zakelšek, Marja (2025): *Feminist Co-Research: The case of Retail Workers in Slovenia*. Notes from below. Available from: https:// notesfrombelow.org/article/feminist-co-research-the-case-of-retail-workers-in (27 June 2025).

Farris, Sara (2017): *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Hakimova, Aigul (2009): "Od delavca do delavca, za boljše življenje" : intervju z Arminom Salihovićem, aktivistom Nevidnih delavcev sveta. *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* 37(238): 66–75.

Hoffman, Marcelo (2019): *Militant Acts: The Role of Investigations in Radical Political Struggles*. New York: Suny Press.

Hughes, Lydia and Woodcock, Jamie (2023): *Troublemaking: Why You Should Organize Your Workplace*. New York: Verso.

IWW (2009): Izjava proti novi uredbi o kvoti delovnih dovoljenj za tuje delavce. *Časopis za kritiko znanosti 37*(238): 93–95.

Kanduč, Zoran and Bučar-Ručman, Aleš (2016): Razredna vojna, delo in migracije : primer delavcev migrantov v Sloveniji. *Dve domovini* 43: 77–89.

Kurnik, Andrej (2009): Aktivistična raziskava, biosindikalizem in subjektiviteta migrantskih delavcev. *Časopis za kritiko znanosti,* 37(238): 53–65. Available from: https://www.dlib.si/details/URN:NBN:SI:DOC-FTWWXP0N (27 June 2025).

McAllister, Clark (2022): *Karl Marx's Workers' Inquiry: International History, Reception, and Responses.* London: Notes from Below.

Mezzadra, Sandro (2011): The Gaze of Autonomy. Capitalism, Migration and Social Struggles. In: *The Contested Politics of Mobility: Borderzones and Irregularity*, V. Squire (ed.), 121–143, London: Routledge.

Močnik, Rastko (2011): Trg delovne sile in sestava delavskega razreda. *Teorija in praksa* 48(1): 178–205.

Mohandesi, Salar (2013): Class Consciousness or Class Composition?. *Science & Society* 77(1): 72–97.

Notes from Below (2018): *The Workers' Inquiry and Social Composition.* Notes from Below. Available from: https://notesfrombelow.org/article/workers-inquiry-and-social-composition (28 June 2025)

Pajnik, Mojca, Bajt, Veronika and Herič, Sanja (2010): Migranti na trgu dela v Sloveniji. *Dve domovini* (32): 151–167.

Panariti, Loredana (2024): A Historical Analysis of Left-wing Trade Union Positions regarding Bangladeshi Workers in Monfalcone (Italy) and Bosnian Workers in Slovenia. *Dve domovini* 59: 133–154.

Vinčič, Irina (2013): Nevidni delavci sveta kot avtonomni prostor organiziranja migrantskih delavcev. Časopis *za kritiko znanosti* 41(251): 102–109.

Woodcock, Jamie (2014): The Workers' Inquiry from Trotskyism to Operaismo: A Political Methodology for Investigating the Workplace. *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organizations* 14(3): 493–513.