

Adult Education, Social Selectivity and Inclusion: Evidence from Slovenia and Implications for Deinstitutionalisation

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Abstract

Adult education is widely promoted as a driver of personal development, social mobility and labour-market adaptability; however, participation in lifelong education and learning remains uneven. This paper examines factors associated with participation in formal and non-formal adult education in Slovenia, with a focus on social inclusion and barriers affecting disadvantaged groups. Using Labour Force Survey (LFS) data and binary logistic regression, we test how individual, educational, occupational and spatial characteristics predict participation. The results show marked social selectivity: women participate more than men; participation decreases with age; and people with higher educational attainment participate substantially more. Participation is also higher among those in managerial roles or on fixed-term contracts, while people born abroad and those living outside large cities are less likely to participate. Descriptive evidence additionally indicates a substantial participation gap by disability status. Building on these findings, we discuss a possible intersectoral approach to inclusion in the context of deinstitutionalisation in Slovenia, focusing on how existing community-learning infrastructures, such as SIAE Study Circles and selected programmes delivered by adult education centres (Folk high schools), could support participation in community life. Because outcomes are not yet known, this approach is presented as a practice-based proposal that would require monitoring and evaluation during any future implementation. A compassion-centred lens (awareness, compassion, loving-kindness and wisdom) is proposed as an enabling condition for sustainable cross-sector cooperation between social protection, adult education and local communities. Keywords: adult education; participation inequalities; inclusion; deinstitutionalisation; people with disabilities; cross-sector cooperation

1. Introduction

Adult education and lifelong learning are widely promoted as pathways to personal development, employability and social inclusion. However, participation remains unequally distributed across social groups. The core policy challenge is therefore not only how much adults learn, but who participates and who is systematically left out.

Participation in education tends to follow identifiable social patterns: it often reflects accumulated advantages in cultural and social capital, confidence in navigating institutions and the ability to convert resources into learning opportunities. From this perspective, adult education can function as a selective field, reproducing inequalities unless compensatory mechanisms reduce barriers for those with fewer resources [1]. Participation in adult education is also shaped by barriers and constrained choices (“bounded agency”) embedded in welfare regimes and social contexts [2-4]. This means that participation is not only a question of personal motivation. People who already have more education, support, information and confidence are more likely to use learning opportunities, while those with fewer resources may remain excluded because of practical, social or institutional barriers.

To examine participation inequalities empirically, we analyse Slovenian Labour Force Survey / Survey on Active and Inactive Population (LFS/ANP) data using binary logistic regression. We model how individual (gender, age), educational, occupational and spatial characteristics jointly shape the probability of participation in formal or non-formal education during the four weeks preceding the survey [5].

A critical extension of this discussion concerns people with disabilities. Lower participation in adult education is not only an educational outcome; it can also signal weaker access to social networks, community routines

and low-threshold public spaces where belonging is built. This is especially relevant when disability intersects with other exclusion risks such as lower education, rural residence or being born abroad.

Participation inequalities acquire additional urgency in Slovenia's ongoing deinstitutionalisation. The national strategy aims to support transitions from institutional care to community living while strengthening community support structures and preventing new institutional placements [6]. International guidance emphasizes that relocation alone is insufficient: inclusion requires access to mainstream services and facilities, including education, culture and leisure, on an equal basis with others [7-8].

In practical terms, successful community living requires more than housing and formal support. People transitioning from institutional settings often need meaningful activities, opportunities for social learning and accessible entry points into local community life. Instead of creating parallel programmes from scratch, we discuss a possible practice-based link between adult education and deinstitutionalisation, focusing on how existing community-learning structures, particularly SIAE Study Circles and selected programmes delivered by adult education centres (Folk high schools), could support meaningful participation in community life [9]. As outcomes are not yet known, this approach is presented as a feasible option to be monitored and evaluated during any future implementation. The partnership behind this paper reflects the idea that inclusion requires both evidence and the conditions that make practice possible. SIAE contributes the empirical adult-education research presented in this paper, together with trusted community-learning infrastructure through Study Circles. IRSSV brings knowledge of deinstitutionalisation and community-based support. The Inner Peace Institute contributes NGO-based facilitation approaches grounded in the contemplative tradition described by Dahl and Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, where awareness, compassion, loving-kindness and wisdom are understood as trainable capacities for reducing harm and cultivating prosocial action [10-11]. These capacities are increasingly relevant in civil-society practice, where inclusion depends not only on services and structures, but also on the quality of relationships, attention and presence. Conceptually, we therefore treat inclusion as more than service coordination: it requires recognition of interdependence and an orientation toward the common good, understood as promoting 'good for all' and reducing harm. This brings into the discussion an often-overlooked dimension of inclusive practice: the inner conditions through which people, professionals and communities, become able to meet one another differently. Slovene educational scholarship similarly frames education as formation for responsible action and belonging, not only as measurable performance, especially in times of disruption [12-13]. Ethical codes in education emphasize respect, dignity and non-harm as professional obligations, resonating with the need for non-judgmental facilitation when people rebuild community life after institutionalisation [14-15]. Reflections on "overlooked time" further highlight patience and slowness as resources for learning and relationship-building [16]. Building on these perspectives, a compassion-centred lens is introduced as an enabling condition for sustained cross-sector cooperation and for the gradual transformation of institutional habits into relations of trust, participation and shared community life [10-11,17].

Objectives of the paper are to: (1) test whether participation in adult education in Slovenia can be predicted from individual, educational, occupational and spatial characteristics using LFS/ANP data and binary logistic regression; (2) demonstrate social selectivity of participation by identifying groups with systematically lower participation; and (3) discuss implications for inclusion of people with disabilities in the deinstitutionalisation process and outline a possible intersectoral approach to inclusion that draws on SIAE Study Circles as community-learning infrastructure and would require monitoring and evaluation during any future implementation.

2. Data and Methods

The paper adopts a combined methodological approach. The quantitative part analyses Labour Force Survey / Survey on Active and Inactive Population data using binary logistic regression to identify social patterns in participation in adult education. The second part is practice-based and conceptual rather than evaluative. It uses the empirical findings as a starting point for discussing why participation inequalities matter in the context of deinstitutionalisation, what deinstitutionalisation means and does not mean, and how existing community-learning infrastructures could support inclusion in community life. This design enables the paper to connect statistical evidence on unequal participation with a broader discussion of community living, access to mainstream services and the conditions needed for inclusive practice.

2.1 Data Source and Sampling

The empirical analysis is based on secondary data from the Survey on Active and Inactive Population (ANP), which in Slovenia is conducted in accordance with the harmonized methodology of the European Labour Force Survey (LFS). The sampling design is stratified, and data is collected using standardized procedures, ensuring comparability across EU Member States. For the purposes of this analysis, the analytical sample was restricted to the adult population aged 25 to 64. For model estimation, age groups include 15–24 as the reference category; therefore, the logistic regression uses the full 15–64 dataset, while descriptive indicators follow standard EU reporting for ages 25–64.

Participation in education is measured using the standard LFS indicator, which includes involvement in formal or non-formal education during the four weeks preceding the survey. The analytical sample does not include individuals living in institutional settings, as these are not covered by the survey sampling frame.

2.2 Operationalisation of Variables and Analytical Approach

The dependent variable is participation in adult education, operationalised as a binary variable distinguishing between individuals who participated in formal and/or non-formal education during the reference period (1 = participates) and those who did not (0 = does not participate). This operationalisation allows for direct modelling of the likelihood of participation in adult education.

Independent variables are selected based on prior empirical and theoretical research on social selectivity in adult education and include gender, age groups, educational attainment, country of birth, labour market status, type of employment, managerial role, and degree of urbanisation.

Where available, indicators of disability-related status are also considered descriptively as an additional dimension relevant for understanding risks of exclusion, particularly in the context of disability and deinstitutionalisation, although they are not included as a central component of the regression model.

The analysis combines descriptive and inferential statistical approaches. First, descriptive statistics are used to present basic patterns of participation. This is followed by binary logistic regression to model the probability of participation in adult education. Results are reported using regression coefficients (B), standard errors, Wald statistics, significance levels (p-values), and odds ratios (Exp(B)), allowing for substantive interpretation in terms of relative likelihoods of participation.

The model is statistically significant ($\chi^2(12) = 2508.36, p < .001$), indicating that the set of predictor variables reliably distinguishes between participants and non-participants. The explanatory power of the model is moderate, with Cox & Snell $R^2 = .127$ and Nagelkerke $R^2 = .187$.

The working-age sample (15–64) includes 30,041 respondents, while the standard EU benchmark sample (25–64) includes 24,784 respondents. The logistic regression model was estimated on the full 15–64 sample to retain the reference group aged 15–24 (often in initial education) and to illustrate the benchmark gap between those in regular education and adults; interpretive emphasis, however, is placed on the adult population.

2.3 Linking Participation Inequalities to Deinstitutionalisation

In addition to the quantitative analysis, the paper includes a practice-based and conceptual component that links the findings on participation inequalities to the context of deinstitutionalisation in Slovenia. This component does not evaluate an existing intervention and does not claim proven effectiveness. Rather, it discusses how the observed patterns of unequal participation may become relevant for people transitioning from institutional care to community living.

The discussion first clarifies deinstitutionalisation as more than relocation from institutions to smaller settings. It understands deinstitutionalisation as a broader transformation that requires access to ordinary community life, mainstream services, meaningful activities, social relationships and opportunities for participation. On this basis, the paper considers how existing adult-education and community-learning structures, particularly SIAE Study Circles and selected programmes delivered by adult education centres (Folk high schools), could serve as accessible entry points into local community life.

Methodologically, this component serves as an applied bridge between empirical findings and practice. The regression results identify groups at higher risk of non-participation, while the deinstitutionalisation discussion shows why such patterns matter for inclusive community living. Any practical use of these ideas would need to be monitored and evaluated during future implementation.



2.4 Limitations

The study does not include individuals living in institutional settings, which limits the direct empirical analysis of populations central to deinstitutionalisation processes. The practice-based component represents a conceptual and practice-oriented extension of the empirical findings. It is understood as a possible approach for further development, whose outcomes would need to be monitored and evaluated, rather than as an empirically validated solution. A further limitation is that the headline participation indicator is reported for ages 25–64, whereas the regression model includes ages 15–64 in order to retain the 15–24 reference category; this choice should be considered when interpreting age effects.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Patterns

Slovenia recorded a relatively high participation rate in adult education in 2024, with 23.1% of adults aged 25–64 engaged in formal or non-formal learning activities [5]. This places the country well above the EU-27 average (13.5%) and among the better-performing European systems. At an aggregate level, this suggests a comparatively strong foundation for lifelong learning.

However, aggregate performance masks substantial inequalities. Nearly 80% of adults did not participate in education or training during the observed period, indicating uneven access and engagement. Moreover, Slovenia still lags leading Nordic countries, where participation is both higher and more systematically embedded in institutional frameworks. This suggests that participation remains unevenly distributed and partly dependent on short-term or project-based initiatives rather than a fully consolidated lifelong learning system.

Descriptive patterns further indicate variation across key socio-demographic and structural characteristics, including age, education, labour market position, and place of residence, pointing to the presence of systematic participation gradients.

3.2 Main Logistic Regression Model

To examine these patterns more systematically, a binary logistic regression model was estimated to identify predictors of participation in adult education. The dependent variable captures participation in formal or non-formal education, while independent variables include gender, age, education, country of birth, employment characteristics, degree of urbanisation, and managerial responsibility.

Table 1. Logistic Regression Results

Predictor	B	SE	Wald χ^2	df	p	OR
Gender						
Female (ref. male)	0.221	0.037	34.81	1	< .001	1.25
Age (ref. 15–24)						
25–34	-1.336	0.074	325.70	1	< .001	0.26
35–44	-1.561	0.076	426.16	1	< .001	0.21
45–54	-1.637	0.075	481.69	1	< .001	0.20
55–64	-1.910	0.081	562.46	1	< .001	0.15
Education (ref. less than secondary)						
Secondary	0.439	0.096	21.12	1	< .001	1.55
Tertiary	1.390	0.098	202.33	1	< .001	4.02
Country of birth						
Born abroad (ref. Slovenia)	-0.496	0.069	52.17	1	< .001	0.61
Employment status						

Predictor	B	SE	Wald χ^2	df	p	OR
Fixed-term (ref. permanent)	1.104	0.059	345.45	1	< .001	3.02
Degree of urbanization (ref. large city)						
Small town	-0.294	0.050	34.76	1	< .001	0.75
Rural area	-0.236	0.048	23.85	1	< .001	0.79
Managerial responsibility						
No managerial duties (ref. managerial role)	-0.291	0.045	41.85	1	< .001	0.75
Constant	-0.578	0.116	24.65	1	< .001	0.56

Note. OR = odds ratio (Exp(B)). Reference categories are shown in parentheses. All p-values are based on Wald tests.

The model confirms that all included predictors are statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating that participation is strongly structured by socio-demographic and labour-market factors.

Age emerges as the most pronounced predictor. Because the 15–24 reference group includes many individuals in initial education, this comparison should be read as a benchmark; within the adult population (25–64), participation still declines with age. Compared to the youngest group (15–24), the odds of participation decline sharply across all older age groups (OR = 0.26 to 0.15), reflecting a clear life-course gradient. Educational attainment is another key determinant: individuals with secondary education are more likely to participate than those with lower education (OR = 1.55), while tertiary-educated individuals exhibit substantially higher odds (OR = 4.02), indicating cumulative advantage in access to learning.

Gender differences are present but more moderate, with women showing slightly higher odds of participation than men (OR = 1.25). Being born abroad is associated with lower participation (OR = 0.61), suggesting structural barriers linked to migration background.

Labour-market characteristics further reinforce these patterns. Individuals with fixed-term contracts are significantly more likely to participate than those with permanent employment (OR = 3.02), which may reflect activation mechanisms or employment-related incentives. In contrast, individuals without managerial responsibilities show lower participation (OR = 0.75), pointing to the role of workplace context and job complexity.

Spatial disparities are also evident. Compared to residents of large cities, individuals living in small towns (OR = 0.75) and rural areas (OR = 0.79) have lower odds of participation, indicating the importance of local availability and accessibility of learning opportunities.

Overall, the model demonstrates that participation in adult education is not randomly distributed but follows clear structural patterns that reflect accumulated advantages and constraints.

3.3 Disability-related Participation Gap

Although disability is not included as a central predictor in the regression model, descriptive evidence reveals a strong participation gradient by level of disability. Adults without disabilities participate at a rate of 24.6%, compared to 13.4% among those with moderate limitations and only 6.7% among those with severe disabilities. The combined participation rate for people with disabilities is 11.3%, indicating substantially reduced access to learning opportunities.

3.4 Deinstitutionalisation: From Relocation to Community Participation

Building on the disability-related participation gap identified in the previous section, we now turn to deinstitutionalisation as a reform context and a possible response to exclusion. This section explains what deinstitutionalisation is, what it is not, and why it matters for participation in adult education and community learning. Table 2 provides a concise distinction between genuine deinstitutionalisation and practices that may only relocate or resize institutional care. The key message is that deinstitutionalisation requires choice, control, ordinary housing and stable support in the community. Without these elements, people may remain subject to institutional rules, transinstitutionalisation or reinstitutionalisation, even if they no longer live in a large institution.

Table 2. What deinstitutionalisation is and is not

Deinstitutionalisation IS	Deinstitutionalisation IS NOT
Choice and control over where and with whom a person lives, and support shaped around the person.	Living in group settings where people must adapt to organizational rules and do not control everyday life.
Closing or transforming institutions while developing diverse community-based supports in parallel.	Downsizing or renovating institutions without building accessible and sustainable community supports.
Moving people to ordinary homes and ensuring home- and community-based support.	Transinstitutionalisation (moving from one institution to another, including smaller institutional units).
Stable, sufficient support in the community regardless of changes in support needs.	Reinstitutionalisation (return to institutional care due to lack of support in the community).

Note. Adapted from the IRSSV guidebook on deinstitutionalisation [20].

Deinstitutionalisation is not simply a matter of moving people from institutions to smaller residential settings. It is a long-term reform process that seeks to reduce and close institutional living arrangements while developing diverse community-based support. It also requires continuous reflection on power relations and everyday practices, rather than a one-off organisational reform [18]. A key risk is that institutional culture and control practices can be reproduced in smaller community settings if institutional space remains available as a fallback. This may undermine genuine community participation and learning [18]. Within Slovenia's current reform agenda, this underscores the need to link transitions to community living with inclusive, low-threshold adult-learning and community-learning opportunities, consistent with the national strategy and human-rights guidance on access to mainstream services and facilities [6-8,17].

Across Europe, deinstitutionalisation has been pursued for decades. Complete closures of large institutions have been achieved in several settings (e.g., Trieste/Italy, Stockholm/Sweden, Scotland and Ireland), illustrating both feasibility and the time and coordination required to shift resources from institutional care to community-based support [19]. The Slovenian guidebook on deinstitutionalisation emphasizes that even when material conditions improve, institutional life remains inherently segregating: people have limited choice over where and with whom they live, daily routines are governed by organizational rules, and everyday contact with community life is constrained, resulting in a loss of ordinary life and dignity for people who have committed no offence [20].

Successful transitions therefore depend on meaningful participation in everyday community spaces, education, culture, leisure and civic life, supported by accessible, low-threshold opportunities and relationship-building [8,17,20]. In terms of adult education, community-learning formats such as Study Circles can provide structured social learning, trusted local networks and purposeful roles, helping to rebuild social ties after long periods of institutionalisation and reducing the risk of isolation or reinstitutionalisation [9,20].

4. Discussion

The results highlight social selectivity in adult education participation in Slovenia: participation is patterned by education, age, migration background, labour-market context and urbanisation. Descriptive disability-related findings show that adults with disabilities participate much less often in education. In line with the bounded agency perspective and research on participation in adult learning, adult education can reinforce cumulative advantage unless barriers are actively reduced and participation is supported for those with fewer resources [2-4]. This is also consistent with Bourdieu accounts of unequal distributions of cultural and social capital and their reproduction through education [1].

Beyond the strongest gradients by education and age, several predictors suggest where inclusion efforts may need additional practical scaffolding. Women show slightly higher participation than men, while people born abroad participate less, which may signal persistent barriers related to language, recognition of prior learning, institutional trust and social networks [2-4]. Workplace context also matters, participation is higher among those on fixed-term contracts and lower among those without managerial responsibilities, implying that training can be driven by employment-related incentives and organizational roles rather than by stable, self-directed learning opportunities [2-4]. Finally, lower participation in small towns and rural areas points to uneven local availability and accessibility of learning opportunities [2-4]. Although disability is not included as a predictor in the regression model due to the limited number of respondents with disabilities included in

the sample, descriptive data show a pronounced participation gap, with adults with severe disabilities being the least likely to participate in education.

In the context of deinstitutionalisation, these patterns are particularly relevant. Many people transitioning to community living will not benefit from workplace-based training incentives. Some may also move to smaller local environments where formal learning opportunities are less available. This strengthens the case for low-threshold, locally embedded community-learning formats and supported entry points into existing networks.

For people with disabilities, the descriptive participation gap suggests that barriers in accessibility, adapted provision and supportive facilitation remain substantial. This matters for inclusion policy because participation in community learning can provide not only skills but also structured routines, peer contact and access to local networks, elements that are central to community belonging. [5]

In the context of deinstitutionalisation, these inequalities are especially salient. Slovenia's strategy anticipates transitions from institutional care to community living and emphasizes the need for strengthened community support and inclusive community development [6]. Human-rights guidance further stresses that reforms must ensure access to mainstream services and facilities and involve cross-sector measures and attitudinal change [7-8]. Adult education and community learning can therefore be treated as part of inclusion infrastructure rather than as an optional add-on.

Accordingly, we discuss a possible intersectoral approach to inclusion that draws on SIAE Study Circles as existing community-learning infrastructure, together with selected programmes delivered by adult education centres (Folk high schools). This approach is not presented as a proven model for deinstitutionalisation. Instead, it is framed as a feasible practice-based proposal whose outcomes should be monitored and evaluated during any future implementation. Feasible monitoring indicators include: (1) participation and retention (attendance across sessions), (2) participant-reported belonging and satisfaction, (3) growth of social contacts and community participation, (4) facilitator observations on accessibility and support needs, and (5) cross-sector coordination routines (referrals, feedback loops, local partner engagement).

Finally, the transition from institutional to community-based living is also a cultural transition. Building on contemplative scholarship that frames awareness, compassion, loving-kindness and wisdom as trainable capacities supporting prosocial action and reducing harm [10-11], we introduce a compassion-centred lens as an enabling condition for sustained cross-sector cooperation and for supporting culture change during transitions. This aligns with educational scholarship that re-centres the ethical purpose of education and views learning as relational and community-forming, especially in times of disruption [12-13], and with ethical codes that foreground dignity, non-harm and responsibility in educational practice [14-15]. Alongside these capacities, attention to time and relational facilitation can be treated as practical conditions for inclusive community learning and partnership work [16].

Limitations include the use of LFS data that does not cover people living in institutions and limited space for full model specification. Future work should therefore evaluate this possible approach through mixed-method monitoring (quantitative participation and inclusion indicators plus qualitative feedback from participants, facilitators and local partners).

5. Conclusion

Adult education participation in Slovenia is socially selective and predictably patterned by education, age and place. The participation gap by disability status indicates substantial barriers in mainstream learning opportunities. In the context of deinstitutionalisation, we therefore discuss a possible intersectoral approach to inclusion that draws on SIAE Study Circles as existing community-learning infrastructure, with outcomes to be monitored and evaluated. A compassion-centred lens (awareness, compassion, loving-kindness and wisdom) is suggested as a feasible condition for cross-sector cooperation and for supporting culture change during transitions to community living.

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