

**Information on the Activities of the Slovak Republic in the Area of Improving the Status
of the Roma National Minority in the SR
(2009)**

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1. Introduction

Since 1991, the Roma have been considered as a national minority in the Slovak Republic. In the population census (May 2001) **89,920 persons** declared themselves to be Roma; more realistic estimates place the number at **320,000**. This number was also confirmed by the sociological mapping of Roma settlements implemented with the support of the Government of the Slovak Republic and completed in 2004. The demographic estimates range between **400,000 and 500,000**.

The Government Council of the Slovak Republic for National Minorities and Ethnic Groups acts as an advisory and coordinatory body for the government in the area of the policy of the Government of the Slovak Republic towards persons belonging to national minorities and ethnic groups. Each of the twelve officially recognised national minorities (Hungarian, **Roma**, Ruthenian, Ukrainian, German, Croatian, Czech, Moravian, Polish, Bulgarian, Russian and Jewish) has equal reputation/parity representation in the council; each minority has one representative. The representatives of the minorities are nominated by national associations, federations and societies. The council is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for Knowledge-Based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities. The minister of culture acts as vice-chairman of the council. Representatives of central state administrative bodies and independent experts (including one from Hungary and one from the Czech Republic) are invited to the council sessions. Only the representatives of the national minorities vote in the council and it is prohibited for the council to take decisions on issues of a specific national minority or ethnic group in the absence of the representative of that group. Representatives of state authorities and experts in relevant areas who are invited to attend meetings do not have voting rights.

The Council **implements opened and comprehensive policy in relation to the persons belonging to national minorities.**

The institutional resolution of the matters of the Roma communities is covered by **the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for the Roma Communities** with six regional offices (Banská Bystrica, Košice, Prešov, Spišská Nová Ves, Rimavská Sobota, Nitra). The regional offices provide counselling and methodological guidance in implementing the programs approved by the Government in the areas of education, health, housing and the social area in particular.

The Working Plan of the SR Government and the statute of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for the Roma Communities delegates to the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for the Roma Communities the elaboration of annual reports on activities. The Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for the Roma Communities also prepares a regular semi-annual statement for **the Committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on Human Rights, Minorities and the Status of Women**.

Several **Acts, concepts and projects** related to the education, housing, employment and health of Roma have been and are implemented in the SR with the aim to improve the living conditions of Roma and their inclusion in the majority society while preserving their national identity.

In the course of 2007-2008, Act No. 365/2004 Coll. on equal treatment in certain areas and protection against discrimination and amending and supplementing certain other laws as

amended (hereinafter referred to as “the Anti-discrimination act”) was amended.

The second amendment, Act No. 85/2008, reacted to the non-existence of legislative anchoring of so-called temporary compensatory measures through the provision of § 8a, through which **temporary compensatory measures** were introduced in Section 2, which may be adopted if

- a) **obvious inequality exists,**
- b) **the aim of such measures is to decrease or eliminate this inequality,**
- c) **they are appropriate and essential to achieving the aim set.**

At the same time, **the circle of subjects and the state administration authorities, eligible** to receive such measures have been defined as well as the **subject of the temporary compensatory measures** such as the **elimination of the forms of social and economic disadvantages and disadvantages arising due to age or disability with the aim to ensure equality of opportunities in practice.**

Such temporary compensatory measures, in particular, are measures

- a) **consisting of the promotion of the interests of members of disadvantaged groups in employment, education, culture, healthcare and services; and**
- b) **ensuring the equality in access to employment and education especially through targeted preparation programs for members of disadvantaged groups or through dissemination of information on these programs or on possibilities to apply for jobs or places in the system of education.”**

Temporary compensatory measures may be adopted only in the areas provided for in this act. Such measures shall terminate once the inequality, which lead to the adoption of these measures, is eliminated.

The Government of the SR approved “**SOLIDARITY-INCLUSION-INTEGRITY, the Medium-term Concept of Roma National Minority Development in the Slovak Republic for the Period of 2008 – 2013**”. The medium-term concept is based on an analysis of the previous government concepts; it defines the current issues in the field of education, health, employment and housing and proposes relevant measures. The material contains new ideas and levels of perception of the current Roma situation such as gender issues and subsequent missionary work in the locations at the highest risk. The baseline framework for the medium-term concept was constituted by the Manifesto of the Government of the SR, approved by Resolution No. 660 of July 31, 2006 and the concepts approved by the Government, which pointed out the fact that the process of policy design in relation to the resolving of the issues of a part of the Roma is defined as a multi-dimensional circle of issues which must be approached in a comprehensive and ad hominem manner.

2. Social Area and Employment

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR continues through the Social Development Fund in implementing the “**Community Social Work Program**” targeted especially on the population of Roma settlements, socially and geographically segregated communities. The aim of this program is to increase the social mobility of Roma, initiate structural transformations and recovery processes on site and to cooperate with the subjects implementing development programmes on site through **community social workers**. Furthermore, the social workers carry out social and counselling activities; they cooperate

with the municipality and district authorities in the rehabilitation of Roma families in which the upbringing and development of children is disturbed and they help to minimize the risks of children connected with life in a socially disadvantaged environment.

Through the grant scheme, the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the SR Government for the Roma Communities supported programmes and projects with the aim of the integration of Roma in the labour market by creating communal companies of social enterprises/activation enterprises as instruments supporting the development of the municipalities, creating and maintaining jobs, resolving social issues and improving the quality of public benefit services on the local level.

3. Housing

The Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the SR continues in implementing the **“Programme for the Support of the Construction of Lower Standard Communal Rental Flats Designated for Citizens in Material Need and of Technical Infrastructure Building in Roma Settlements”**.

The construction of the lower standard flats took place in 2008 in 36 municipalities where a total of 617 flat units were built based on the Programme of the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the SR. The overall financial costs amounted to SKK 256,982,000 (8 million and 566,066 Euro).

The following **instruments and measures** are used in the area of housing:

- institute of a special recipient of material need benefits;
- Community Social Work programme;
- Local Social Inclusion Partnerships;
- monitoring and counselling of the regional offices of the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the SR Government for the Roma Communities (OPSRGRC);
- the cooperation of the regional offices of the OPSRGRC with Regional Land Registers (Cadastral Offices) and the Slovak Land Fund in promoting the priority municipalities within the Roma community for the assignment, elaboration and completion of the register, for the renewal of the land register and in the use of the possibility of exchanges and long-term leases of plots for the benefit of municipalities and the Roma community;
- the cooperation of the OPSRGRC in crisis management on various administrative levels of the Ministry of Interior of the SR and the self-government;
- support of projects in the field of housing from funds from the OPSRGRC Grant Scheme.

The Office of the Plenipotentiary of the SR Government for the Roma Communities signed a “Memorandum of Understanding” with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2007 which also creates the framework for cooperation in the collection, analysis and distribution of data related to living conditions in Roma communities in Slovakia.

4. Health

In September 2008, the Government of the SR approved the “**Second Phase of the Programme for the Support of the Health of Disadvantaged Communities in Slovakia for the Period of 2009 – 2015**” which continues in the work of the First Phase of the Programme for the Support of the Health of Disadvantaged Roma Communities in the Period of 2007 – 2008.

The implementation of this programme began in 2009 through the cooperation of **30 community workers in the field of healthcare education** with the Regional Offices of Public Healthcare. The funds for implementing the Second Phase of the Programme are ensured from the budget chapter of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic.

The expected output will be constituted by the enhancement of health awareness with an orientation on learning the habits of a healthy lifestyle, healthcare and increased responsibility for own health in the case of populations of segregated and separated Roma settlements and locations. The support of integration, increasing the chances of finding jobs, support for achieving higher education, increasing the quality of life and improving the social and economic status are related to this.

The OPSRGRC, in cooperation with the Office of Regional Healthcare and the community centres, cooperated in the implementation of the following **programmes and projects**:

- community healthcare assistance programme;
- rat and insect extermination in high-risk locations;
- programmes of a preventative character;
- healthcare educational lectures.

5. Education

In 2008, the Government of the SR adopted the following **Acts and concepts** in the field of education:

- **The Act on Upbringing and Education;**
- **The Concept of Upbringing and Education of Roma Children and Students Including the Development of Secondary and Tertiary Education;**
- **The Concept of the Upbringing and Education of National Minorities;**
- **The Concept of Pre-school Education in Connection with the Preparation of Children Starting Elementary School.**

In May 2008, the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted *Act No. 245/2008 on Upbringing and Education (the “School Act”)* and on changes and amendments to some Acts which entered into effect and force on September 1, 2008.

Pursuant to the School Act, upbringing and education are based especially on the principle of **the ban on all forms of discrimination and segregation in particular and free of charge education in kindergartens one year before the beginning of the fulfilment of compulsory school attendance.**

Transformation in kindergartens:

- kindergartens became part of the school system;
- upbringing and education will be managed by the state education programme for kindergartens;
- class sizes were decreased;
- separate classes and kindergartens for gifted and talented children may be found;
- parents of children in the last year before beginning elementary school do not pay for their children's contribution to the partial coverage of costs and others.

Transformations in elementary schools:

- The classification of primary education (1st level) and lower secondary education (2nd level) has been introduced in compliance with international standards.
- The schools will educate students according to their own school education programmes. (As of September 1, 2008, this pertains to students of the first and fifth years).
- Individual education of students on the first level is enabled.
- The maximum number of students per class is reduced.
- First year students will be able to have 5 lessons in a row, it means by one more than currently.

The goal of the “Concept of the Upbringing and Education of Roma Children and Students Including the Development of Secondary and Tertiary Education” is to improve the quality of the upbringing and education of Roma children and students and to increase the success rate of students in finding jobs.

The Government of the SR respects the codification of the Roma language according to the western system of 1971, when the language commission at the Union of Gypsies-Roma in Slovakia adopted the binding norm for the entry of the Slovak dialect of the Roma language. **The ceremonial proclamation of the standardization of the Roma language in Slovakia** and the accompanying signing of the **“Declaration of the Roma of the Slovak Republic Regarding the Standardization of the Roma Language in the Slovak Republic”** by the representatives of the Roma national minority took place at the Historical Building of the Slovak Republic National Council **on June 29, 2008 in Bratislava**. The objective of the standardisation of the Roma language was to officially proclaim the Roma language and place it on an equal footing with the other languages of national minorities living in Slovakia.

The State Pedagogical Institute continues in implementing the National Project **“Increasing of the Qualification Potential of the Members of the Roma Community through the Introduction of the New Study Orientation – Roma Studies in the System of Secondary School Education”**. In addition to general qualifications (universal subjects and foreign languages) the students of such study orientation will acquire a qualification from the subject “Roma studies”; they will be qualified in Roma language, literature and history and they will also acquire the necessary prequalification for working in schools and school facilities with predominantly Roma students, in Roma communities and institutions that deal with Roma issues.

Testing within the State Pedagogical Institute's project **“Experimental Verification of the Roma Language and Literature Curriculum at Elementary and Secondary**

Schools and the Roma Studies at the 2nd Level of Elementary and Secondary Schools” continues. Several textbooks, manuals and lexicons published within the framework of this project are tested in practice in upbringing and educational processes at selected schools.

The financial ensuring of free of charge preschool education and upbringing of children from the age of 5 at kindergartens, i.e., the state payment of the monthly allowance per child to the municipalities, significantly helps in the implementation of the **preschool preparation** of Roma children.

The Office of the Plenipotentiary of the SR Government for the Roma Communities also provides **support to the students through the scholarship programme** of the grant scheme through the Open Society Foundation. Its goal is to support talented Roma students in secondary schools and institutions of higher education. In 2007, the OPSRGRC contributed SKK 1,890,000 in support of 112 secondary school students and 35 students of universities.

The Roma Studies Institute at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Healthcare of the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra creates the possibility to prepare qualified Roma intelligentsia and members of the majority community with the goal of optimizing the Roma social-cultural situation in the Slovak Republic. Its influence on scientific research on the national and international levels is also significant. Currently, the RSI ensures the preparation of university students and experts who will work with the Roma community in the accredited study programme social work.

Special Schools

The relatively high number of Roma students at **special schools** for students with mental disabilities was caused due to the use of standard tests for assessing school maturity and intellectual potential regardless of the home environment of the child.

In order to eliminate this shortcoming, new specific tests were launched in practice in 2004 (outputs for the Phare 2001 project – **Test of School Competence for Socially Disadvantaged Children and the RR Screening - Test Barrier for the Exclusion of the Mental Retardation of Children of the Ages of 6 – 10 from Social Disadvantaged Environments**).

Pursuant to the School Act, the director of the school shall decide on whether to accept a child with special upbringing and education needs based on a written application of the child’s legal representative and a written statement of the facility for upbringing counselling and prevention that is issued based on a diagnostic examination of the child. Before accepting a child with special upbringing and education needs to school the director of the school with an education programme for children with special upbringing and education needs **will inform the legal representative of all of the educational possibilities for such child.**

In the event of the violation of the laws and regulations, effective tools exist in the form of **school inspections or controls by the Regional School Authorities**, which shall resolve individual cases.

6. Culture

The Ministry of Culture of the SR develops wide ranging and effective cooperation with the organizations of the 12 national minorities (Hungarian, **Roma**, Czech, Ruthenian, Ukrainian, Croatian, Polish, Moravian, Bulgarian, German, Jewish, Russian) living in the Slovak Republic. The political, organizational and financial support of their activities in the sphere of ensuring and developing the cultures of national minorities and ethnic groups also ensures the free use of their language and respect for their common special features and values.

The Ministry of Culture of the SR ensures the support of the **culture of the national minorities and ethnic groups and disadvantaged groups of the population through the grant programme – Culture of National Minorities** targeted on support for the issuance of **periodical and non-periodical publications** for the members of national minorities, through live culture - state **theatres** with the programme in the language of the national minorities, state **museums** oriented on the issues of minorities, **civil associations** developing all 12 minority cultures, activities of the professional folklore ensemble MUS Mladé srdcia (Young Hearts) – Ifjú Szivek, activities of regional public **education centres**, regional and district **libraries** and the **broadcasting of programmes in the language of national minorities in the public media – Slovak Radio and Slovak Television**.

Overview of funds allocated within the framework of the Ministry of Culture of the SR for the support of Roma culture in the period of 2003 – 2008:

Nationality	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Roma	7,387,800 SKK	8,232,000 SKK	7,870,000 SKK	16,385,000 SKK	11,482,000 SKK	15,030,000 SKK

Broadcasts on Slovak Radio for members of the **Roma**, Ruthenian, Ukrainian, Czech, German and Polish national minorities is ensured by – **The Section for National and Ethnic Broadcasting**.

Roma Magazine is the Slovak Television programme designed for members of the **Roma national minority**.

7. Prevention of Xenophobic Acts and Violence

The successful **project of police specialists who work with Roma communities** was launched in 2004 with the goal to improve the cooperation of the police with the Roma minority. In 2007, the number of police specialists was increased to 118 and they operate in all regions. Their role is to increase the legal awareness of members of the Roma community, provide counselling services to them while guaranteeing police adherence to the human rights of Roma. Through their activities they strive to eliminate barriers related to the lack of confidence and trust between the police and Roma citizens. The projects have met with a positive response in the locations with higher percentages of the Roma population; these citizens have begun to address policemen with greater trust in their requests for help.

The expert working group that works with the coordination of policies and information exchanges regarding the manifestations of extremism was created under the control of the Deputy Prime Minister of the SR for Knowledge-based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities.

8. CESTA (THE ROAD) Project

The coordinated preparations of the **CESTA Project** also began in cooperation with the Košice, Prešov and Banská Bystrica self-governing regions and through these regions with municipal and city self-governments in cooperation with the Union of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia.

CESTA Project – “Community Service Centres” – the field pilot implementation of the tool for the transformation of the quality of life for multiply marginalized Roma communities in the self-governing regions of Košice, Prešov and Banská Bystrica was originated as the initiative of the Košice self-governing region. It is aimed at the comprehensive resolution of issues of Roma communities which are not able to solve their own issues due to multiple marginalization.

The main goal of this project is to improve the life situation and to integrate socially excluded communities with respect to their special needs and conditions through necessary special assistance in the scope of the competences of self-governing regions, towns, municipalities and the state administration. The plan is to create a tool (Community Service Centres) which will ensure strategic planning in the field of community work, the implementation of strategies adopted by the town/municipality, the implementation of project activities, the coordination of activities implemented by other subjects (schools, healthcare facilities, NGOs) and the coordination of assistance services.

9. Significant Events with International Participation

From April 7 – 9, 2008, the European conference dedicated to the education of Roma children – “The Upbringing and Education of Roma Children and Youth: a Look Ahead” **which was organized by the SR within the framework of its presidency at the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe was held in Bratislava.**

Thomas Hammarberg, the Commissioner of the Council of Europe for Human Rights and the high representatives of European countries also participated at this conference under the auspices of **Dušan Čaplovič, Deputy Prime Minister of the SR for Knowledge-based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities and Anina Botošová, Plenipotentiary of the SR Government for the Roma Communities.**

The conference took place **in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the SR, the Ministry of Culture of the SR, the Ministry of Education of the SR and the Council of Europe.**

During individual panel discussions, the issues of the responsibility of the ministries of education and the possibilities of the integrated education of Roma children were discussed as well as the responsibilities of the providers and recipients of education, including the responsibility of parents and families in the wider sense of the word, respecting ethnic identity and language diversity as well as possibilities for preventing the early discontinuation of school education.

The conference included representatives of state and educational institutions from 49 countries, contractual countries of the European Cultural Convention, representatives of the international inter-governmental organizations and international NGOs.

On December 7, 2007, “**The Follow-up Seminar Regarding the Implementation of the Framework Convention on the protection of National Minorities in the Slovak Republic**” as part of the second round of the Framework Convention monitoring took place under the auspices of Dušan Čaplovič, Deputy Prime Minister of the SR for Knowledge-based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities. The seminar was organized by the Government Office of the Slovak Republic in cooperation with the Council of Europe. The following participated in this seminar – a representative from the Council of Europe, representatives of the central state administration and self-governing bodies, representatives of national minorities living in Slovakia, members of the Government Council of the SR for National Minorities and Ethnic Groups and representatives of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Slovak Republic.

The aim of this seminar was to determine the level of progress achieved in the implementation of the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and to discuss the steps which have been taken or are planned to be taken with the goal of implementing recommendations of the second evaluation report and resolution. The seminar was also an instrument for opening public discussion on implementing the Framework Convention before submitting the third implementation report.

The Slovak Republic participates in the programme “**The Decade of Inclusion of the Roma Population 2005 – 2015**” (the “**Decade**”) of the World Bank and the Open Society Foundation. In January 2005, the Government of the SR approved **the National Action Plan of the Decade**, which identifies its intentions in the priority areas of education, health, employment, and housing. The SR is currently the fifth chair country of the Decade in the period from July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010.

10. Structural Funds

The National Strategic Referential Framework 2007 – 2013 is the basic strategic document of the SR for the use of EU funds in the period of 2007 – 2013. It establishes the national priorities which will be co-financed from the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund in the future programme period in connection with the Strategic Guideline of the Community. **Marginalized Roma communities also belong to the horizontal priorities of the strategic framework.** The most significant objectives are constituted by increasing the levels of employment and education of these communities and improving their living conditions. Funds from the EU in the amount of **178 million EUR** were allocated for the given plan through the Operation Programmes of individual resorts, **which constitutes ¼ of the EU funds for the issues of resolving the situation of the Roma national minority in the SR.** **The Section of the Coordination of the Horizontal Priority - Marginalized Roma Communities** within the framework of the OPSRGRC is the coordinator of the horizontal priority - marginalized Roma communities in the scope established by the National Strategic Referential Framework.