

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## External Document

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## Slovakia: Roma children and the right to education Factsheet

### The Roma in Slovakia

- o An estimated 500,000 Roma live in Slovakia, concentrated mainly in the east and south of the country. They are the second largest minority constituting 9.25 per cent out of a population of over 5.4 million. Approximately one third of the Romani population in Slovakia, live in settlements situated outside towns and villages, with limited or no water or electricity supplies, sanitation systems, paved roads or other basic infrastructure.
- o The Romani population tends to suffer disproportionately from higher rates of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and disease. Unemployment among Roma is estimated at 80-90 per cent, and in settlements it can reach almost 100 per cent.
- o The Roma are often the targets of police ill-treatment or of racially motivated violence by private individuals or groups, and are sometimes denied justice in seeking redress for abuses against them.

### The education of Roma

- o The School Act 29/1984 establishes that citizens shall have right to free education in primary and secondary schools. It specifies that pupils with special educational needs are those who suffer from "*mental, hearing, visual and physical disability, healthily weakened and sick pupils, pupils with communication problems, the pupils with autism, pupils with psychical and **social** development problems*". [emphasis added by Amnesty International]
- o Preparatory (Zero grade) classes were introduced in the Slovak education system in 2002. The classes are designed to help children to catch up with other children in their school education but they are not compulsory. The majority of pupils in such classes are Romani children who have missed pre-school education.
- o Decisions on placement in special schools or special remedial classes within ordinary schools are made at school entry age or shortly afterwards on the basis of assessments that put Romani children at a disadvantage, because they usually do not speak Slovak and have not had the benefit of pre-school education.
- o Sometimes, Roma children are placed in special schools without having even attended the registration process.

### Factors leading to the denial of the right to education

- o School segregation -- In some parts of eastern Slovakia, up to 100 per cent of schools are segregated.
- o High numbers of Romani children in special schools and classes -- Romani children constitute up to 80 per cent of pupils in special schools in some regions of Slovakia. They receive a substandard education and have in practice very remote possibilities of integrating into mainstream schools or of advancing beyond compulsory education.
- o Lack of access to pre-school education for Roma -- only up to 25 per cent of Romani children get pre-school education. Pre-school fees, and limited space in pre-school classes where priority is given to children whose parents are employed, deprive many Romani children of the benefits of pre-school education.
- o Denial of linguistic and cultural rights -- Roma have only been recognized as a national minority in Slovakia since 1991, but do not enjoy attendant language and cultural rights. There are only four secondary schools in the country which offer classes in Romani language and literature. There are only 25 teachers in the whole of Slovakia who teach in Romani.

### Two Roma settlements in eastern Slovakia -- Letanovce and Jarovnice

The village of **Letanovce**, in the Spisská Nová Ves district of the Košice region in eastern Slovakia, is situated near the Slovak Paradise (*Slovenský Raj*) National Park. According to official figures in the 2001 Census, the village has

1,913 inhabitants, of whom 20.54 per cent (397 people) are Roma, but other sources suggest the figure might be as high as 35 per cent (667 people). Just over a third of the Roma live in homes in the village, others occupy a settlement of 92 shacks 2km from the village, close to the national park. The settlement is not connected to the electricity grid. One public water pump provides the only source of water, and residents have the use of about 20 outdoor toilets. Houses are heated by burning wood gathered from the nearby forest. One bus service a day comes to the nearest paved road, about 100m from the settlement. It takes the children to school at 7.30am and returns at 1pm, at a cost of 4 Slovak koruna (€ 0.11) each way. If children want to stay in the village after school, they must walk home. A community centre, part of an European Union (EU) project, is based in the village centre, not even close to the settlement thus making it impossible to be used by the Romani community. Although a new Romani settlement is being built with EU funding, it is the same distance from the village of Letanovce as the old one. Its location was the subject of protest petitions by residents in the town and nearby villages who objected to its proximity to their homes. There are two schools in Letanovce -- a mainstream primary school funded by the Catholic Church and a special primary school. At the mainstream primary school, more than half the pupils are Roma.

Katarina and Vladimir Krušten live in a one-room shack in the settlement with most of their six children. They live on social security. Occasionally, Vladimir gets temporary unskilled work. Three of their children go to the special school and one to the basic school. Although Katarina Kruštenova would like to help her children with their studies, there is no electricity in their house and no room to keep schoolbooks at home. She would like to give them regular baths but it is difficult when there is no running water and they all share one room only.

The settlement at **Jarovnice** is the largest Romani settlement in Slovakia (and reportedly in Europe), with a population of 4,051 according to the 2001 census. There are two basic schools in the village -- one for Roma children and one for non-Roma. Until 1991-92, all children went to the same school. However, the non-Roma parents applied to the municipal and regional authorities to have their children transferred to the building of the nursery where there were spare rooms. Since then, non-Roma and Roma children are completely segregated. The Roma school, the biggest in the country with over 700 students, is oversubscribed with children studying in two shifts. The only nursery of the village is based in the majority population school with children being segregated into non-Roma and Roma groups. From the nursery, non-Roma and Roma children go to the respective non-Roma and Roma schools. The directors of both schools claim that both non-Roma and Roma parents prefer to keep their children segregated. A Roma parent told Amnesty International that he would love his children to go from the nursery to the non-Roma school but the director will not allow this.

#### **Legal framework**

- o The 1992 Constitution recognizes that the citizens of national minorities or ethnic groups shall be guaranteed: a) the right to be educated in a minority language, b) the right to use a minority language in official communications, and c) the right to participate in decision-making in matters affecting the national minorities and ethnic groups.
- o The 2002 Basic Positions of the Slovak Government's Roma Communities Integration Policy notes that the disproportionately high representation of Romani children in special schools requires immediate attention.
- o The National Action Plan adopted in the context of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 aims to cut down the number of Roma children attending special elementary schools and special training facilities.
- o The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, to which Slovakia has been a party since 1993, sets forth the obligation of state parties to prohibit and eliminate "racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law". State parties are required to prevent, prohibit and eliminate discrimination, including in respect of "the right to education and training".
- o The EU Race Equality Directive prohibits discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin in access to education and training.

#### **Recommendations to the government of Slovakia include to:**

- o Immediately make and widely publicise a clear and unequivocal political commitment to eradication of segregated education of Roma;
- o Prioritise the realisation of the right to free and compulsory education for Romani children;
- o Reverse segregation in education;
- o Amend the School Act to grant the Romani language the same recognition as that given to the other minority languages specified;
- o Establish an effective complaints mechanism to allow parents the possibility of effective redress. This should be independent and impartial, with the capacity to investigate and to initiate investigations of all allegations of segregated placement and to receive individual complaints;
- o Prioritise adequate housing, access to clean water and sanitation for Romani communities.

#### **Recommendations to the European Union and other bilateral and multilateral donors include:**

- o Support the government of Slovakia in all genuine efforts to address the systematic violation of the right to education of Romani children through providing necessary financial and technical assistance;
- o Encourage the government of Slovakia to implement the recommendations of this report, in particular on desegregation;

- o Ensure the participation of the Roma community from the early stages of policy definition to the implementation and evaluation of programmes;
- o Ensure that all measures taken to improve living conditions of Roma in Slovakia are consistent with international human rights law and standards.

**Specific recommendations to the European Union include:**

- o Monitor the correct incorporation and implementation of the anti-discrimination directives into the national legislation of Slovakia;
- o Adopt an integrated policy on Roma to make efficient use of available legal, financial and policy tools;
- o Clearly and explicitly identify Roma within existing and comprehensive anti-discrimination and social inclusion policies, encouraging Slovakia to address Roma as a target group for the purposes of their National Action Plan on Social Inclusion, Lifelong Learning, Employment and other relevant policy frameworks;
- o Ensure that the use of EU funds does not lead to racial segregation in the fields of education, housing, healthcare.

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