



EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

“Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning in Slovakia”

Introduction

This report was prepared by Zuzana Havírová (havir.zuzana@gmail.com) from Roma Advocacy and Research Centre which has long been dedicated to Roma inclusion in all areas of life. Through its research and advocacy activities, the organization contributes to the formation of public policies aimed at strengthening the rights and position of Roma in Slovakia and improving the living situation of Roma from poor and marginalized localities.

Methodology and the geographical scope

The main objective of the report is to describe access of Roma to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning in Slovakia. We have chosen secondary analysis as a method for the elaboration of the report, analysing documents, research studies and public policies in the field of education. Secondary data analysis is a useful tool for comparing studies and data collected by other researchers. It is important to note that some data in the analyses are based on ascribed ethnicity, or data from the Atlas of Roma Communities¹, as it is not possible to collect ethnic data in Slovakia and nor educational statistics are disaggregated by ethnicity. In educational statistics as well as in the law, there is a category referred to as "coming from a socially disadvantaged background," which also includes children from marginalized Roma communities. We have supplemented the secondary analysis with information that we have gathered over many years of research work.

Brief overview of the socio-economic situation of the Roma in Slovakia

The Roma are living in Slovakia in different socio-economic conditions. According to the Atlas of Roma Communities from 2013² about 400 thousand Roma live in Slovakia, of which 46.5% of Roma live integrally among the majority population in the same socio-economic conditions, 11.5% live in settlements within the municipality, 23.6% live in settlements on the outskirts of the municipality and 18.4% live in segregated communities. Most Roma communities are located in the Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov regions. Most of the settlements in which marginalized Roma live are rural, with a smaller proportion located in urban areas. In these regions we find the largest number of segregated Roma communities, in which several disadvantages and generational poverty accumulate.³

¹ The Atlas of Roma Communities is a settlement-based survey of the living conditions of Roma in Slovakia.

² In 2019, another geographical survey of Roma communities took place. However, due to the use of a different methodology in the detection and subsequent inaccurate interpretation of the data, we do not draw this data. We are using data from 2013, because they are more methodological legitimate.

³ Mušíňka et al, *Atlas rómskych komunit na Slovensku 2013* (Bratislava: Regional Centre UNDP in Bratislava, 2013), available at: https://www.minv.sk/?atlas_2013

In the light of several research findings⁴, experts agree that the area of education is one of the most crucial areas for the inclusion of excluded groups. Quality and, above all, inclusive education has an impact on multiple areas. In terms of systemic impact, it contributes to improved interethnic relations, the breaking down of stereotypes and prejudices, and the building of a cohesive and non-racist society. On an individual level, it affects areas such as the improvement of individuals' social capital, increased opportunities for social inclusion, and enhancement of quality of life. The combination of systemic and individual impacts ultimately brings positive effects for society as a whole.

Roma access to quality and inclusive education in Slovakia

Early childhood education and care

In Slovakia, children living in marginalized Roma communities are particularly at risk of generational poverty, with 7,535 children aged 0–3 years living in these communities.⁵ According to data from the EU SILC_MRC⁶ and EU SILC surveys, in 2020 the share of children from marginalized Roma communities aged 0 to 2 attending nursery was 1.6%, while in the overall population it was 0.3%. In 2018, this share was 1.4% for marginalized Roma communities and 1.6% for the overall population – the lowest among EU countries. For comparison, the EU average in that year was 34%.⁷

The data for 2020 may have been affected by measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which childcare facilities were closed for several months. However, the overall capacity does not allow for a higher share of enrolled children. In 2019, there were a total of 3,390 nursery places in Slovakia, meaning that out of the total 177,000 children aged 0 to 2 years, a maximum of only 1.9% could attend.⁸

⁴ See for example: OECD. 2019. Economic Surveys: Slovak Republic 2019 or Kahanec, M. a kol. 2020. The social and employment situation of Roma communities in Slovakia.

⁵ National Strategy for the Development of Coordinated Early Intervention and Early Care Services 2022-2030. Available at: <https://www.employment.gov.sk/files/slovensky/rodina-socialna-pomoc/socialne-sluzby/ostatne/narodna-strategia-rozvoja-koordinovanych-sluzieb-vcasnej-intervencie-ranej-starostlivosti.pdf>

⁶ Markovič, F.- Plachá, Ľ. 2020. Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania EU SILC_MRK 2020. USVRK, 2020, available at: https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/files/1563/analyticka_sprava_eu_silc_mrk_2020_elektronicka_final.pdf?csrt=16467433414994029417

⁷ OECD. 2021. Familydatabase-Enrolmentinchildcareandpre-school. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/data/datasets/family-database/pf3_2_enrolment_childcare_preschool.pdf

⁸ Markovič, F.- Plachá, Ľ. 2020. Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania EU SILC_MRK 2020. USVRK, 2020, available at: https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/files/1563/analyticka_sprava_eu_silc_mrk_2020_elektronicka_final.pdf?csrt=16467433414994029417

In Slovakia, there is still a relatively strong consensus that children under the age of 3 should be cared for by their parents. Family policy is also based on this principle. The Parental Allowance Act⁹ stipulates that the parental allowance is a state social benefit through which the state contributes to an eligible person for ensuring proper care of a child up to the age of 3. The basic amount is set at €345.20 per month.¹⁰

Parental allowance can also be claimed if the parent is working. It is not a condition that the parent must stay at home from employment; the parent may go to work. In such a case, the parent must ensure proper care of the child through a facility such as a nursery, or a private caregiver.

In 2020, nearly one-third (32%) of children aged 3 to 5 from marginalized Roma communities (MRC) attended kindergarten, as did a similar share (34%) of children from integrated households. In the overall population, however, the figure was 87%. Although the share of children from MRC attending kindergarten increased compared to 2018 (from 24% to 32%), the gap between MRC and the general population persisted. The difference was even more pronounced among younger children aged 3 and 4 years (24% in MRC vs. 87% in the general population). There was also a disparity in the length of stay in kindergarten – full-day care (more than 5 hours) every weekday is used by 59% of MRC children attending kindergarten, while in the general population, it is 73%. Children from MRC therefore attend kindergartens less often and spend less time there compared to children from the general population.¹¹

Since September 2021, pre-primary education has been mandatory for all children aged 5. After the introduction of this law into practice, the share of five-year-old children in pre-primary education increased to 95.6%. However, in 2021, there were still 2544 children outside the pre-primary education system.¹²

In terms of the reasons why children aged 3 to 4 do not attend pre-primary education, parents of 64% of children from marginalized Roma communities (MRC) stated that they prefer home care provided by a non-working household member. Among parents of children from integrated households, the preference for home care was also the most common reason (54%).¹³

⁹ Act No. 571/2009 Coll. on Parental Allowance and on the Amendment and Supplementation of Certain Acts, available at: https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2009/571/#error=login_required&state=94eb67a4-67c2-44dd-9f92-8c24f4769dbc

¹⁰ Act No. 571/2009 Coll. on Parental Allowance and on the Amendment and Supplementation of Certain Acts, available at: https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2009/571/#error=login_required&state=94eb67a4-67c2-44dd-9f92-8c24f4769dbc

¹¹ Markovič, F.- Plachá, Ľ. 2020. Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania EU SILC_MRK 2020. USVRK, 2020, available at: https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/files/1563/analyticka_sprava_eu_silc_mrk_2020_elektronicka_final.pdf?csrt=16467433414994029417

¹² Škavernina, O.- Martinák, D. Nezaškolení. Inštitút vzdelávacej politiky, 2023. Available at: <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/ed7/27447.d5d4f2.pdf>

¹³ Markovič, F.- Plachá, Ľ. 2020. Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania EU SILC_MRK 2020. USVRK, 2020, available at:

One of the most significant barriers to enrolment in pre-primary education is financial constraints. The enrolment rate of children aged 3–4 was lowest among households with the lowest income levels.¹⁴

Low enrolment is also linked to the availability of preschool capacity. In municipalities with a severe shortage of places, only 34% of children aged 3–4 were enrolled, compared to 70% in municipalities with limited but not critical shortages. A higher share of children was enrolled in areas with at least balanced capacity, where the number of available spots in kindergartens roughly matched the number of children with permanent residence in the municipality and its surroundings. A similar relationship between capacity and enrolment applied to five-year-old children as well. Fewer children were enrolled in municipalities without a kindergarten compared to those with one - a difference of 10 percentage points for 3–4-year-olds and 5 percentage points for 5-year-olds. The enrolment rate also decreased as the distance to the nearest kindergarten increased. Children aged 3–4 who lived five or more kilometres from the nearest preschool had significantly lower enrolment rates (58%). On the other hand, only a small share of children was affected by such long distances, as up to 81% of all preschool-aged children (3–5 years) had the nearest kindergarten within one kilometre of their permanent residence.¹⁵

Financial barriers to education

In the case of financial barriers that hinder the education of Roma children, the most common are fees related to the everyday functioning of the school. At the primary school level, these include costs associated with entering the first grade, such as pens, pencils, a school bag, indoor shoes, and gym clothes. In later grades, they may involve fees for hygiene supplies, workbooks, and various school trips. A particularly significant expense is the cost of meals, which can pose a serious obstacle to school attendance or contribute to Roma children feeling unwelcome or uncomfortable in the school environment. Although the law¹⁶ provides for a subsidy to support children's nutritional habits, the way this subsidy is implemented may lead to the stigmatization of poor children. In the first case, a child is entitled to the subsidy if they attend a kindergarten or primary school where at least 50% of the children come from households in material need. This often applies to segregated schools. In the second case, a child is eligible for the subsidy if they live in a household in material need and their legal guardian submits a written request to the school canteen. In some cases, parents are reluctant to apply for the meal subsidy because they do not want their child to be perceived as coming from a poor family that cannot afford lunches.

https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/files/1563/analyticka_sprava_eu_silc_mrk_2020_elektronicka_final.pdf?csrt=16467433414994029417

¹⁴ Vančíková, K. a kol. Inklúzia Rómov od raného detstva+. OSF, REF, UNICER, 2017. Available at: https://osf.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/RECI_Slovak-Republic-report_SLO-01-12-2018-highres.pdf

¹⁵ Škavernina, O.- Martinák, D. Nezaškolení. Inštitút vzdelávacej politiky, 2023. Available at: <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/ed7/27447.d5d4f2.pdf>

¹⁶ Act No. 544/2010 Coll on subsidies

When it comes to higher education, the biggest barriers are accommodation and travel costs. If students from poor backgrounds cannot find part-time work, they also face a lack of money for food and study materials. A few years ago, our organization helped a Roma student who was studying at university. The student had three siblings, and his parents could not afford to buy him a laptop, which he needed for his studies. He didn't need money for food or transportation because he occasionally worked at construction sites and various events. However, the money he earned was only enough to cover transportation, accommodation, and the purchase of necessary books. He couldn't afford a laptop. So, we agreed within the organization on an amount each of us would contribute, and we bought him a new laptop.

Non-financial barriers to education

Among other non-financial barriers, we would include various administrative obstacles, such as application procedures or the verification of school certificates, particularly when students are applying to universities. We do not consider it problematic that there are no secondary or higher education institutions in the immediate vicinity of segregated areas where poor Roma communities live. In fact, doing so would lead to further segregation and, consequently, exclusion from society. Even if these schools were of the highest quality, they would not meet the conditions necessary for creating social ties with the majority population and therefore would not be beneficial for Roma students.

Slovakia already has an example¹⁷ of how the state attempted to bring secondary education directly to marginalized Roma communities. This practice resulted in an entire generation being educated in a segregated environment at both the primary and secondary level, leading to their complete social isolation from the majority population.

School segregation and schools for special needs

The problem of segregation of Roma children in education in Slovakia persists. More than a fifth of all schools show serious disparities in educational outcomes – including significantly higher-grade repetition rates, lower standardized test scores and higher dropout rates compared to schools not at risk of segregation. The depth of these inequalities points to the failure of the Slovak school system to respect the principle of equal treatment. Infrastructural deficiencies further exacerbate inequality. So-called “Roma schools” often lack basic facilities such as gyms or playgrounds. The practice of double-shift operation – a system that almost exclusively affects Roma children – further limits their access to quality education. Moreover, the way in which finances and resources are allocated continues to support segregation, with segregated schools receiving financial support even without respecting the principles of desegregation.¹⁸

¹⁷ Balážová, Z. Elokované pracoviská stredných odborných škôl pri marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách. CVEK, 2015. Available at: <https://cvek.sk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Elokovane-pracoviska-final-1.pdf>

¹⁸ Amnesty International Slovakia and ERRC. Oddelení a nerovni. Správa o (ne)riešení segregácie vo vzdelávaní na Slovensku. 2025. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.sk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/oddeleni-a-nerovni-sprava-amnesty.pdf>

According to the second EU Minority and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II)¹⁹ from 2016, 62% of Roma students in Slovakia attended schools where the majority of the students were Roma children. According to the latest publicly available findings from the EU SILC_MRK 2020 survey, this share has increased to 67%.²⁰ According to a report prepared by the Ministry of Finance in 2020, students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds²¹ are more than four times more likely to repeat a grade than other students (13% versus 3%) and almost twice as likely to not continue their education after completing compulsory education (11% versus 6%). The figures are even more alarming when it comes to socially disadvantaged students from marginalised Roma communities.²² The data provided are essentially all available statistics regarding discrimination against Roma children in mainstream education.

The lack of data is mainly because Slovak institutions do not collect data based on ethnicity.²³ A child who graduates from a special primary school can continue secondary education at a practical school or a vocational school. A practical school (formerly a vocational school for pupils with mental disabilities) is the most common path for graduates of special primary schools. The education lasts 1 to 3 years, usually without a final exam with a certificate of completion. The aim is to teach pupils basic work and social skills (e.g. simple auxiliary work in the kitchen, cleaning, gardening, etc.).

A vocational school for pupils with mild mental disabilities who attended variant A or B of a special primary school offers simple vocational subjects (e.g. auxiliary construction work, tailoring, cooking). The study usually lasts 2-3 years and can end with a certificate of completion. Children who attended a special needs school are not eligible to study in secondary school programs that lead to a school-leaving examination.

In recent years, the Slovak government has taken several steps to address the unjust and inappropriate placement of children, and particularly Roma children, into special schools. However, these measures have often been criticized as insufficient or too slow. One of the most important reforms is the change in the process of diagnosing and assessing children's school abilities. Since 2016, Slovakia has adopted new guidelines for psychological and special pedagogical diagnostics in order to prevent the misidentification of mental disabilities based on linguistic or socio-cultural differences.

¹⁹ EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey with a focus on Roma – Selected Findings (EU-MIDIS II) 2016, p. 30. Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/eumidis-ii-roma-selected-findings>

²⁰ Markovič, F., Plachá Ľ., Income and living conditions in marginalized Roma communities: Selected indicators from the EU SILC_MRK 2020 survey, Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities, 2022. Available at: https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/eu-silc_mrk/

²¹ Note: This category does not exclusively include children from marginalized Roma communities.

²² Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, Review of Expenditure on Groups at Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion, March 2020, p. 55. Available at: <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/28f/15944.3bab36.pdf>

²³ Amnesty International Slovakia and ERRC. Oddelení a nerovní. Správa o (ne)riešení segregácie vo vzdelávaní na Slovensku. 2025. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.sk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/oddeleni-a-nerovni-sprava-amnesty.pdf>

Early school leaving and NEETs

People from marginalized Roma communities receive less education both in quantitative terms (number of years) and qualitative terms (type of school completed). As a result, two-thirds (67%) of people from MRC aged 16–24 are neither in education nor employed (NEET), compared to just 12% in the general population. Among graduates of special schools/classes and non-certificate vocational programs from MRC, the NEET rate is as high as 80%.

Moreover, gender disparities within MRC are significantly larger than in the general population or among integrated households. While the NEET rate among MRC women aged 16–24 is 12 percentage points higher than among MRC men, the gap is only 1 percentage point in the general population. Specifically, as many as 73% of young women from MRC are NEET compared to 60% of young men.²⁴ Roma belong to the groups with the highest share of NEET due to several interrelated reasons.

Many Roma children are wrongly or disproportionately placed in special schools or classes, where they receive a lower level of education, often without the opportunity to obtain a vocational certificate or complete secondary school with a diploma. Segregated schooling (e.g., “Roma” schools or classes) leads to lower-quality education, weaker motivation, and isolation from the majority society. Dropping out of school early is also common, especially among girls who get married or have children before completing primary education.

Roma families often live in poverty and lack sufficient resources to support their children’s education. They are missing school supplies, computers, internet access, and help with homework. Parents with low educational attainment are often unable to guide or support their children in making decisions about their future. Roma also frequently face discrimination in the labour market, as employers may reject them even when they meet the job requirements. Negative stereotypes and prejudice from society further reduce their chances of success. Gender stereotypes place Roma girls at even greater risk, as traditional expectations, early pregnancies, and marriages often lead to premature school dropout.

Antigypsyism in education, training, and lifelong learning

Antigypsyism most often manifests in education through the segregation of Roma children. From the very beginning of their educational journey, Roma children face antigypsyism, as society generally expects that they will not succeed. As a result, it is assumed they do not need quality and accessible education. This approach is most visible in areas with marginalized Roma communities. Since Roma integration has not been addressed systematically over the long term, the majority population's attitude toward Roma in these areas also displays features of antigypsyism across all aspects of life.

²⁴ Markovič, F., Plachá Ľ., Income and living conditions in marginalized Roma communities: Selected indicators from the EU SILC_MRK 2020 survey, Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities, 2022. Available at: https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/eu-silc_mrk/



Even upon entering preschool, Roma children are confronted with antigypsyism. This manifests in the way that Roma children are placed in separate classrooms and not mixed with non-Roma children. These practices are often justified by the claim that non-Roma parents do not want their children to attend school with Roma children. There are several reasons for this, but the main one is to prevent Roma children from mixing with non-Roma children, as it is assumed that Roma children will slow down non-Roma children, and it is therefore better to separate them so that non-Roma parents do not complain that their children are learning more slowly.

Such practices continue into primary education, where separate classes are created or entirely Roma-only schools are formed without non-Roma students. The quality of education in these schools is then lowered, justified by the notion that Roma children only need to learn a limited curriculum or that they do not need to know more because they are not expected to pursue further education and will rely on social welfare. Statistics mentioned earlier in the text support the claim of low-quality education.

The majority population often justifies the existence of segregated Roma schools by claiming that Roma parents choose Roma-only schools to avoid their children being discriminated against or bullied. In reality, Roma parents often have no other option and simply place their child in the nearest school. Another issue is the design of school catchment areas, which are often drawn in such a way as to reflect the location of marginalized Roma communities. For instance, only parts of a village where most Roma live may fall within a certain school district, effectively ensuring that non-Roma children attend a different school. In rural areas, antigypsyism is particularly evident in the failure to provide the same quality of education in schools with Roma children as in majority-populated schools. Teachers often claim that Roma children come to school unprepared and do not understand Slovak because their native language is Romani.

Our legal system, however, recognizes so-called support measures, which allow the use of the Romani language as a tool to help integrate children into education. This tool is barely used. In fact, last year the Ministry of Education attempted to establish the first Romani school in the village of Rakúsy to promote teaching in the Romani language. The problem was that the ministry selected a school in a segregated area, leaving Roma parents with no other choice if they did not want to send their child to a Romani-only school. Moreover, national minority education should be the domain of the minority itself. Only the minority has the right to initiate or establish a minority school, not the Ministry.

Slovak legislation includes a definition of segregation and also prohibits segregation in education. However, enforcement of these legal frameworks is minimal. Both the state and municipalities claim that desegregation is difficult when a marginalized Roma community is present in a locality, or when Roma make up the majority of the population in a village. Despite expert recommendations on how to desegregate under such conditions, the Slovak government has not implemented measures such as school busing or creating micro-regions to restructure school catchment areas.



Every Roma child has encountered antigypsyism. For example, a Roma girl in the 9th grade from eastern Slovakia wanted to apply to nursing school, but her teacher told her she would be better off attending vocational school to become a seamstress. The teacher claimed that patients would likely reject her as a nurse but that working in a factory would protect her from racist abuse. The student was deeply hurt by this attitude from someone she had expected to support her. Nevertheless, she submitted her application to nursing school and was accepted. Today, she is doing practical training in a hospital and has said that she has never encountered racism from patients.

Even in higher education, we often see the belief that Roma students should study social work so they can go back and help impoverished Roma communities. This is yet another form of antigypsyism that Roma students must fight against to claim their place in society, pursue the careers they want, and succeed in various fields.

Antigypsyism in education is also reflected in the way the state attempts to create programs intended exclusively for Roma children, disguising these initiatives as inclusive education. One example is the effort to introduce pre-primary education specifically for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, primarily referring to Roma children. However, creating such education would only deepen segregation.

A similar situation occurred with the aforementioned approach to secondary education, where satellite branches of vocational secondary schools were established near marginalized Roma communities. These only led to even greater segregation of Roma.

Any effort to create specific forms of education aimed exclusively at Roma children will always deepen segregation, because Roma children will not be educated together with the majority population in such settings.

Support for Roma parents

In Slovakia, support for poor families is generally very weak and insufficient for low-income parents to provide adequate education for their children. The system of social scholarships has existed for several years, but many experts are calling for changes and reforms so that it can offer meaningful educational support to children from poor families.

When we look at the situation of parents from marginalized Roma communities, they simply do not have the necessary resources to support their children's education. They often lack adequate housing and a home environment that fosters learning, and they are unable to change this if they live in marginalized Roma communities. They cannot help themselves because they have no means to move out of these areas.

Poor housing conditions are also directly related to health. If a family lives in a house without running water or sewage, it is obvious that the hygiene of the children is significantly worse than that of children from the majority population.

In public discourse, it is often stated that parents are primarily responsible for whether and how their child attends school, or what kind of relationship the child has with school. However, if the parents themselves attended segregated or special schools where no one paid attention to them, it is logical that they lack trust in the education system. As a result, they cannot teach their children to trust the system or value education. Often, the parents are so undereducated that they cannot help their children at home, even with basic tasks like homework.

It is common to highlight a single example from a locality where one student successfully completed primary school and then graduated from university. People often refer to this as a best practice example. However, a true best practice is not based on a single exceptional case, but rather on systemic changes that result in many children from a Roma community successfully completing higher education.

There are no special support measures for parents who have gone abroad to work and left their children with relatives.

Educational support measures

A teaching assistant, based on the requirements of the teacher, educator, or vocational training instructor, and in cooperation with specialist staff, helps create equal opportunities in education and upbringing. They support a child, pupil, or group of children or pupils in overcoming architectural, informational, linguistic, health-related, social, or cultural barriers.²⁵ The general problem with support professions is that they are mostly funded by European Union funds, which means their operation is stable only for the duration of the funding period. Once a national project ends, there is a waiting period for the next funding cycle, and it is never guaranteed that the project will continue.

Another problem is that not every teacher's assistant speaks the Romani language, and if a child comes from an environment where only Romani has been spoken since birth, this creates a barrier that is very difficult for the child to overcome. Tutoring or activities after regular school hours take place only if they are part of a specific project, meaning once again that this is not a systemic activity. In many cases, these activities are implemented through non-governmental organizations.

Promotion of Romani culture, history, and language

In Slovakia, the Romani language is not taught in primary schools and can only be studied in private minority secondary schools, but there are no qualified teachers. It is possible to study Romani language, literature, and culture in combination with another language at the University of Prešov. This study program was accredited in 2019 as a bachelor's degree.

²⁵ Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on Pedagogical Employees and Professional Employees and on Amendments and Supplements to Certain Acts

In 1990, the Department of Roma Culture was established at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, which was later transformed into the Institute of Romani Studies. The uniqueness of this institution lay in the fact that it was led by Roma and many Roma also taught there. The institute conducted research on Romani culture and history, and on the formation of Roma identity in modern Slovak history. It also offered higher education in the fields of social work and social counselling. In June 2025, the institute was closed by order of the Dean of the Faculty of Social Affairs at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. As a result, Roma lost an important institution for higher education and research.

We do not have data on the ethnic background of teachers across all levels of the education system, but we believe that Roma are significantly underrepresented as teachers in kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, and universities. There is a clear need for more Roma teachers, not only in schools predominantly attended by Roma children, but especially in schools attended by non-Roma children.

Our chairwoman, Zuzana Havírová, began working as a teacher at a primary school in Skalica in 1999. She was the first Roma teacher to teach subjects such as German, geography, and history, not as a teaching assistant, but as a regular, qualified teacher. This was a major step toward shaping an inclusive and open society in Skalica, as both children and their parents began to perceive Roma not just through media portrayals but, more importantly, through personal experience with a Roma teacher in their primary school.

We perceive the insufficient factual coverage of Roma in primary school textbooks as problematic. An analysis²⁶ of textbooks conducted by the National Institute for Education and Youth in 2025 proves that information about Roma is very scarce in primary school textbooks. Pupils most frequently encounter information about the Roma minority only in the 9th grade. It is precisely at this stage that education emphasizes civic responsibility, understanding between different cultures, understanding the historical and social aspects of Roma life, as well as recognizing stereotypes and discrimination.

Among all the analysed subjects across all grades, Roma are mentioned the least in the 5th grade, even though this is a key age at which pupils' attitudes toward the Roma minority can be shaped through stories. In other grades, Roma are mentioned only sporadically. Most of the information and references to Roma and Roma-related topics can be found in civics and history classes. In terms of incorporating topics about national minorities, specifically the Roma national minority, it is particularly appropriate to use the theme of human rights.

The Roma Holocaust is not taught in school, nor are other historical injustices such as forced sterilisation.

²⁶ See more: [https://spolu-together-jekhetane.sk/uploads/Analýza%20učebníc-výskumná%20správa/Výskumná%20správa %20Analýza%20učebníc 2024.pdf](https://spolu-together-jekhetane.sk/uploads/Analýza%20učebníc-výskumná%20správa/Výskumná%20správa%20Analýza%20učebníc%202024.pdf)

Lifelong learning and the education of adults

The Strategy for Lifelong Learning and Guidance 2021–2030²⁷, adopted in 2021, sets out a comprehensive framework with multiple objectives: qualifications, basic skills, guidance, inter-ministerial coordination, and motivating people. The strategy includes 51 measures divided into 13 thematic areas.

Educational pathways in Slovakia are shorter compared to other countries. Most graduates in Slovakia complete their formal education in the shortest possible time without breaks, which means that there are relatively few students over the age of 25 enrolled in schools. Educational activities for adults in Slovakia therefore consist mainly of trainings, courses, seminars, lectures, workshops, etc. (so-called non-formal education).

Adult participation in education decreases with age and increases with the level of education, with the highest participation among employed individuals. Motivation to continue learning declines with age, and Slovakia reflects this trend. Unlike many European countries where the highest participation is observed among the unemployed, in Slovakia it is the employed who participate the most. Slovakia also mirrors the trend that adult participation in education increases with the level of education, which in the Slovak context is also linked to the fact that education mainly takes place within companies and that employment increases with higher levels of education.²⁸

Second-chance education in Slovakia has both legislative and practical support, but it suffers from ineffective implementation, insufficient support and motivation for participants, limited course flexibility, quality gaps, and a restricted reach, especially in marginalized regions. The rate of early school leaving increased from 4.7% (in 2010) to 8.3% (in 2019), particularly in regions with marginalized Roma communities.²⁹

Support for participants (mentoring, tutoring, financial scholarships, career guidance) is weak, and their awareness of opportunities is low. Not all types of courses meet the required quality standards: flexibility is limited, and many courses do not lead to the attainment of a vocational qualification certificate.

The state has so far failed to implement a fully flexible model. Moreover, second-chance education supports the existence of vocational training programs that are perceived as stereotypical and stigmatizing toward Roma.³⁰

²⁷ https://www.minedu.sk/data/files/11044_strategia-celozivotneho-vzdelavania-a-poradenstva-na-roky-2021-2030.pdf

²⁸ https://www.minedu.sk/data/files/11044_strategia-celozivotneho-vzdelavania-a-poradenstva-na-roky-2021-2030.pdf

²⁹ https://www.minedu.sk/data/files/11044_strategia-celozivotneho-vzdelavania-a-poradenstva-na-roky-2021-2030.pdf

³⁰ Balážová, Z. Elokované pracoviská stredných odborných škôl pri marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách. CVEK, 2015. Available at: <https://cvek.sk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Elokovane-pracoviska-final-1.pdf>

(Digital) Skills for the labour market and for social mobility

Education and training for the labour market of a jobseeker is, within the meaning of Section 44(1) of Act No.5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts, as amended by later regulations, the theoretical training or practical training of a jobseeker which is required for his/her application on the labour market and which enables him/her to acquire new professional knowledge, skills and abilities for the purpose of job placement in a suitable employment.

Training helps to adapt the skills of the labour force to the needs of the labour market, improves access to jobs and contributes to overcoming the socio-economic disadvantages caused by unemployment. Training of a jobseeker within the meaning of the Employment Services Act is not an increase in the level of education.

The Office of Labor, Social Affairs and Family may provide a jobseeker with training within the meaning of Section 46(4) of the Employment Services Act, on the basis of an assessment of the jobseeker's abilities, work experience, professional skills, the level of education attained and medical fitness for work, in particular in the event of a lack of professional knowledge and professional skills, the need to change knowledge and professional skills in view of labour market demand and the loss of the ability to perform the work activity in the previous job.

The training is provided free of charge to the jobseeker on the basis of an agreement concluded with the Labour, Social Affairs and Family Office. After completion of the training, the Labor, Social Affairs and Family Office shall also provide the jobseeker with reimbursement of proven travel expenses for transport and reimbursement of accommodation and boarding expenses within the meaning of Act No 283/2002 Coll. on travel allowances, as amended.³¹

When it comes to digital skills, there are no statistics that specifically reflect the digital proficiency of Roma. Digital skills in Slovakia are at 52%, which is slightly below the European Union average of 56%.³²

When we look at the social mobility of Roma, we can see that those in the most disadvantaged position are Roma living in marginalized, impoverished environments. These Roma lack the necessary social skills for upward social mobility, and since their education takes place entirely in segregated settings throughout their lives, they have no opportunity to improve their social mobility.³³

³¹ Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services

³² <https://www.finreport.sk/ekonomika/digitalne-zrucnosti-slovakov-su-podpriemerne/>

³³ Havírová, Z. Dizertačná práca, 2023.

Education in the National Roma Strategic Framework

Early childhood education and care (for children aged 0–7) in Slovakia is not unified and falls under the responsibility of three ministries: health, education, and social affairs. This alone causes a lack of coordination in addressing the issue. Problems in the area of early childhood care and education have so far been limited to analytical activities rather than systemic measures.

There has been a positive shift in access to kindergartens. From January 2025, kindergartens are financed directly by the Ministry of Education, which clearly ensures better access to pre-primary education for all children. A legal entitlement to a kindergarten place has also been established for three- and four-year-old children. However, we are currently unable to determine how many Roma children have not been admitted to kindergartens due to capacity shortages in preschool facilities. This type of data is missing from Slovakia's educational policy and is not yet collected by non-governmental organizations either.

The issue of school segregation is also not systematically addressed in the education of Roma children in kindergartens. This means that increasing the capacity of kindergartens for Roma children may, in the coming years, be implemented by the Ministry of Education and other institutions in such a way that they are expanded directly within excluded localities. The introduction of compulsory kindergarten clearly affects the success of Roma pupils in primary schools and helps partially prevent their placement in special schools. Although, to this day, we do not have data in Slovakia mapping the effectiveness and impact of compulsory kindergarten on the success of Roma pupils in primary schools, we must state that a persistent problem remains grade repetition and early school leaving in lower grades of primary school.

The action plan defined two activities in response to this issue. The first aimed, in 2022, to increase the number of schools implementing a full-day educational system as a prerequisite for successful completion of primary education, with an emphasis on municipalities with the highest concentration of pupils from marginalized Roma communities (MRC). This activity was carried out through school childcare clubs, with parents' fees covered. According to external evaluations, this fee was temporarily reimbursed from the Recovery and Resilience Plan funds and was not a systemic measure, only a temporary intervention.

The action plan also included an activity aimed at preventing early school leaving by reducing the percentage of underperforming pupils from MRCs through support measures to ensure the proper completion of compulsory education. In July 2024, the Ministry of Education introduced a national project aimed at creating and testing an innovative early warning system to prevent early school leaving. The goal of the new national project is to develop and test this system, which will enable schools and the ministry to identify at-risk pupils and provide them with specific assistance. Early identification and interventions can significantly reduce the number of pupils dropping out of school early. The project has a total allocation of €7,672,788.20 and is managed by the Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology.

Finally, one of the most critical issues in education remains segregation, and the action plan includes several activities addressing it. As part of implementation efforts, the Ministry introduced a new monitoring mechanism for the risk of segregation in 2024, which is also defined in the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan. The initial results reveal that 468 out of a total of 2,067 schools in Slovakia pose a risk of segregated education for Roma pupils. This represents more than one-fifth of schools, which, according to state analysts, also provide low-quality education to Roma pupils.

We view it positively that the Ministry of Education adopted a law requiring primary schools, starting in September 2025, to incorporate desegregation principles into their internal school rules and educational programs. However, it is concerning that even after adopting these principles, new kindergartens, primary, and secondary schools can still be established in excluded localities, as the conditions for founding such schools in segregated areas have been simplified. It is also problematic that the desegregation principles have no effect on the creation of artificial school districts, which will continue to hinder the social mobility of children and perpetuate residential segregation.

Furthermore, from January 2025, the situation will be worsened by the minority education system, as the Ministry of Education has lowered the standards for the establishment of minority schools, which will deepen the segregation of Roma pupils.³⁴

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report highlights the persistent and systemic barriers that Roma children and youth face in accessing quality and inclusive education in Slovakia. Despite some positive policy developments, such as mandatory pre-primary education and new initiatives to monitor segregation, the education system continues to fail a significant portion of Roma children, particularly those from marginalized communities.

Our findings confirm that structural antigypsyism, school segregation, inadequate support systems, and socio-economic disadvantage form a complex web that hinders Roma pupils from achieving equitable educational outcomes. The early years of education are marked by limited access to childcare and kindergartens, followed by segregated and under-resourced primary schools, and in many cases, misplacement into special education. These experiences significantly limit opportunities for secondary and higher education, with far-reaching consequences for employment, social mobility, and integration.

While legal frameworks prohibit segregation and provide for inclusive education, they are poorly enforced, and implementation often lacks political will, coordination, and a long-term vision. Measures labelled as “inclusive” are frequently designed in ways that reinforce segregation, rather than eliminate it.

³⁴ Roma Civil Monitor, 2025



Crucially, the report emphasizes that education is not only a path toward individual empowerment but also a key driver of societal cohesion. Investing in inclusive, high-quality education for Roma children is essential, not only for the future of these children, but for the future of Slovakia as a democratic and equitable society. A comprehensive reform agenda must include data collection disaggregated by ethnicity (with full respect for privacy and consent), active desegregation policies, targeted financial and mentoring support, and the meaningful involvement of Roma communities in shaping educational policies.

Only with sustained commitment and systemic change can Slovakia ensure that every child, regardless of their ethnicity or socio-economic background, has an equal opportunity to thrive.

Parents from marginalized Roma communities face significant challenges that hinder their ability to support their children's education. Poor housing conditions, health issues, and a lack of trust in the education system, rooted in their own experiences with segregated and under-resourced schooling, contribute to ongoing educational disadvantages. Many parents are undereducated themselves and unable to assist their children with basic learning tasks at home.

While individual success stories are often highlighted, true progress requires systemic change that enables many Roma children to complete higher education. Support roles like teaching assistants play a vital part in bridging gaps but are often dependent on temporary funding and may lack necessary linguistic skills, limiting their effectiveness.

Educational opportunities for Roma are further constrained by scarce representation of Roma teachers, insufficient inclusion of Roma topics in school curricula, and fragmented policies around early childhood education. Although recent steps (such as legal entitlement to kindergarten places and new national projects to prevent early school leaving) show promise, data gaps and the persistence of segregation remain critical concerns.

Segregation in schools continues to disproportionately affect Roma pupils, with over one-fifth of schools posing a segregation risk and delivering lower-quality education. Legislative efforts to introduce desegregation principles are positive but insufficient, especially as new schools can still be established in segregated localities and artificial school districts reinforce residential segregation.

Furthermore, lowered standards for minority schools threaten to deepen educational segregation. Without comprehensive, coordinated, and sustained reforms addressing these systemic barriers, Roma children will continue to face limited educational prospects, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion.



Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Enforcement of Anti-Segregation Laws:** Ensure rigorous implementation and monitoring of existing legal frameworks prohibiting segregation in education. Introduce clear accountability mechanisms for schools and local authorities that maintain segregated practices.
2. **Develop and Implement Active Desegregation Policies:** Design and apply concrete measures such as school busing, redrawing school catchment areas, and promoting diverse enrolment to reduce segregation, especially in municipalities with marginalized Roma communities.
3. **Expand and Secure Sustainable Funding for Support Roles**
Provide stable, long-term financing for teaching assistants, tutors, and other support staff who work directly with Roma pupils, including ensuring these professionals have adequate training in Romani language and culture.
4. **Increase Roma Representation Among Educators:** Promote the recruitment, training, and retention of Roma teachers at all educational levels, recognizing their critical role in fostering inclusive learning environments and breaking down stereotypes.
5. **Integrate Roma History, Culture, and Contributions into Curricula:** Enhance school textbooks and curricula across grades to include accurate, positive, and meaningful content about Roma communities to foster understanding and reduce prejudice.
6. **Improve Early Childhood Education Access and Coordination:** Address capacity shortages in childcare and kindergartens, especially in marginalized communities, and establish coordinated policies across relevant ministries to unify early childhood education and care.
7. **Increase Financial and Mentoring Support for Roma Families and Students:** Develop targeted scholarships, subsidies, and mentoring programs to alleviate economic barriers and provide guidance throughout the educational journey.
8. **Prevent the Establishment of New Segregated Schools:** Review and revise policies that simplify the creation of schools in segregated areas or with lowered standards that reinforce segregation, ensuring new schools promote integration.
9. **Engage Roma Communities in Policy Design and Implementation:** Involve Roma parents, educators, and civil society organizations meaningfully in shaping educational reforms to ensure policies reflect their needs and perspectives.
10. **Raise Awareness and Combat Structural Antigypsyism:** Implement public education campaigns and professional development for teachers to address biases, dismantle stereotypes, and foster respect for diversity within schools and society.

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