EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

Roma children in Europe
Child poverty and prevention of family separation in Slovakia
2026

Introduction

This report was prepared by 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.

Research methodology and geographical scope

The main objective of the report is to describe child poverty and prevention of family separation 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 children. 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 Communities[1]*, as it is not possible to collect ethnic data in Slovakia. In general statistics as well as in the laws, 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 our 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 2013[2] *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 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] Mušinka et al, *Atlas rómskych komunít na Slovensku 2013* (Bratislava: Regional Centre UNDP in Bratislava, 2013), available at: https://www.minv.sk/?atlas_2013

Investing in the wellbeing and social inclusion of Roma children is essential to ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to thrive, develop their potential, and participate fully in society. Supporting the wellbeing and inclusion of Roma children not only improves individual outcomes but also strengthens communities and societies. When Roma children grow up in safe, supportive, and inclusive environments, they are more likely to succeed in education, enjoy better health, develop confidence and resilience, and become active contributors to their communities. Investing in their wellbeing helps break cycles of exclusion and disadvantage, promotes social cohesion, and advances children's rights, equality, and social justice for future generations.

Roma children in Europe – child poverty and family separation in Slovakia

Demographic considerations

While it is important to avoid generalizations because the Roma population is diverse, several characteristics are commonly identified in research and policy documents. The Roma population in Slovakia is significantly younger than the general population. According to the Atlas of Roma Communities 2013, children younger than 16 years constitute 39.4% of the Roma population, compared to only 15.3% of the overall Slovak population.[4] *This demonstrates that the Roma community has a much younger age structure and that children and young people make up a substantial share of the population.*

It is difficult to determine the exact number of Roma children living in Slovakia, because even in the case of the Atlas of Roma Communities, accurate data on the number of Roma/children is not collected, and even according to the last official Census of Population, Houses and Dwellings 2021 in Slovakia, it is not possible to accurately determine the number of children of the Roma national minority, because the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic does not publish the number of children by nationality as a standard indicator in summary outputs. Only estimated numbers are collected as a percentage of the number of inhabitants in a given locality. So, according to the percentage estimate, these are numbers between 150 and 190 thousand children.

Roma children in Slovakia are highly diverse and live in different social, economic, and geographical contexts. Many grow up in integrated communities and participate successfully in mainstream education and community life. However, a significant proportion live in marginalized Roma communities, particularly in eastern and central Slovakia, where poverty, social exclusion, and limited access to public services remain persistent challenges.[5] *Families often face high unemployment rates, low household income, inadequate housing conditions, and limited access to public services. Research indicates that children living in marginalized Roma communities are more likely to experience material deprivation, which affects their educational and developmental opportunities.*[6]

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[4] Mušinka et al, Atlas rómskych komunít na Slovensku 2013. Bratislava: Regional Centre UNDP in Bratislava, 2013. Available at: https://www.minv.sk/?atlas_2013

[5] Roma Civil Monitor, 2025, available at: https://romadata.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/rcm2-2024-c1-slovakia-final-slovak.pdf

[6] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). (2022). *Roma in 10 European Countries: Main Results.*Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu

Roma children and young people are also more likely to experience discrimination and segregation. These experiences can affect educational outcomes, access to services, self-confidence, mental wellbeing, and future employment opportunities.[7] Research indicates that socioeconomically disadvantaged children often report lower levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, and perceived competence, which may influence their educational aspirations and social participation.[8] Studies consistently show that children from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve lower average educational outcomes than their more advantaged peers. These differences are associated with unequal access to learning opportunities, educational resources, and supportive environments rather than lower ability.[9] Importantly, many findings emphasizes that these characteristics are not inherent traits of the children themselves but are largely consequences of the environments in which they live.[10]

Roma child poverty

Slovakia does not publish exact official child-poverty statistics by Roma ethnicity, so the best answer is an estimate. Slovakia has roughly 400,000–500,000 Roma people, and around 87% of Roma in marginalized communities are at risk of poverty, compared with about 13% of the general population. This suggests that well over 100,000 Roma children in Slovakia likely experience poverty, especially in marginalized Roma communities.[11]

Roma child poverty often means overcrowded housing, poor sanitation, limited access to water or heating, food insecurity, poor access to preschool and healthcare, and segregated education. EU SILC_MRK 2020 data reported that 87% of households in marginalized Roma communities were at risk of poverty, 52% faced severe material deprivation, and 88% lived in overcrowded households.[12] Children (persons aged 0–17 years) represent the most vulnerable age group both in the overall population and in marginalized Roma communities (MRCs).

This is primarily due to their high dependence on their parents' position in the labour market, which in MRCs is often associated with limited access to services and low household incomes. While the at-risk-of-poverty rate among children in the general population was 17%, it reached as high as 91% among children living in MRCs (73% among children in integrated Roma households). In terms of household type, the groups most exposed to poverty are single-parent households with at least one dependent child (96%) and households with two adults and at least three dependent children (95%). By contrast, the least vulnerable are households with two adults and one dependent child (73%).

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[7] Roma Civil Monitor, 2025, available at: https://romadata.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/rcm2-2024-c1-slovakia-final-slovak.pdf

[8] Li, J.- Zhu, L. – Hesketh, T., 2025, Improving Confidence and Self-Esteem among socioeconomically disadvantaged children: A social Emotial Learning Intervention in Rural China, available at: https://www.mdpi.com/2076-328X/15/10/1352?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[9] OECD. (2024). Starting Unequal: How's Life for Disadvantaged Children? Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/starting-unequal-how-s-life-for-disadvantaged-children_91fcd679-en.html

[10] Martin, A. J., et al. (2024). Personal Agency among Students from Low Socio-Economic Backgrounds. Social Psychology of Education. Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11218-023-09881-0

[11] Roma Civil Monitor, 2025, available at: https://romadata.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/rcm2-2024-c1-slovakia-final-slovak.pdf

[12] 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

Regarding household size, the highest poverty risk is found among families with six or more members (93%), while the lowest risk is observed among three-member households (75%) and single-person households (77%). Looking at the number of dependent children, households with one child (74%) face the lowest poverty risk. However, the risk increases significantly from the third child onward and continues to rise with each additional child: 87% for households with three dependent children, 92% for those with four children, and 98% for households with five or more children. In other words, the more children a household has, the higher its risk of poverty.

A similar pattern can be observed in the general population, where households without dependent children (8%) face the lowest poverty risk, while households with five or more children (58%) are the most vulnerable. The differences between the same types of households in MRCs and in the general population highlight the existence of substantial inequalities in living conditions. The extremely high poverty risk among households with dependent children in MRCs—approaching 100% among single-parent families and households with five or more children—provides further evidence of the severity of the situation. The causes are structural: long-term unemployment, low parental education, spatial segregation, discrimination, poor housing, weak infrastructure, and unequal access to quality schools.[13]

The lifetime effects are serious. Children growing up in poverty are more likely to have poorer health, lower school achievement, early school leaving, unemployment, and poverty in adulthood.

Roma children and housing

Housing deprivation is one of the most visible forms of Roma child poverty in Slovakia. Families in marginalized Roma communities often live in overcrowded dwellings, sometimes with several generations sharing a small space. Overcrowding reduces children's privacy, sleep quality and ability to study, and it increases health risks, especially when sanitation is poor. Research by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights shows that Roma households in Slovakia are disproportionately affected by overcrowding and housing deprivation compared with the general population.[14] *Overall, the housing situation of Roma children in Slovakia is not only a question of poverty, but also of structural discrimination. Segregated housing, poor infrastructure, overcrowding, insecure tenure and environmental risks create conditions that affect children's health, education, safety and future opportunities.*

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[13] Vlačuha, R., Kováčová, Y., 2021. EU SILC 2020 - Indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia, available at: https://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/portal/efb80b8f-cde0-484b-81e3-aeb9b641c8ce/!ut/p/z1/rVJNc4IwFPwtHjhCHgQl9ha140f1YB2r5NIhGCBFCEKU-u8bOz20M7W1M83hTfKyu9lkgxjaIlZGJ5lGWqoy2pt1yHrPy2BKBgOXAgTdEUxn69FyvOq74AN6QgyxuNSVzlCoeBNldpPb1ZFbYMpe5lEshQWnRuj8_LkjEk6Ak8SOdwJsn_jcJq7AdiR4n_d8NyaxuGhXsdyh8Cb05jezzGzDlUHB8Nk7ZDimEz-YA5D5uAtTOlk_9pcYA8UfgB80QuMhuOrhwUObkxQtWpeqLsz7rv54xQmgGWKSF04bFw44rkeCnu-5Pul72MwvgXn1YrhIjWykM1uWiULbm7QNVb4cDoyaQFWpxatG239P1BxCS46J8VeLRNSido61-WeZ1lVzZ4EFbds6qVLpXjixKiz4jpKpxpj7ikRVURB8tvNkcY99xs94f5pT2um8ATJuyzQ!/dz/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/ . 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

[14] Kling, J., 2021, Roma Survey 2021: Main results – Housing, FRA, available at: https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/2023-03-31_psg_roma_jaroslav_kling_fra.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com,

Without strong desegregation policies, investment in infrastructure, secure and affordable housing, and equal access to public services, housing poverty will continue to be transmitted from parents to children.[15] *Poor infrastructure is another serious problem. In many segregated localities, families have limited or no access to safe drinking water, sewage systems, electricity, gas, waste collection or paved roads. These conditions expose children to environmental and health hazards, including damp housing, cold, smoke from unsafe heating, contaminated surroundings and higher risk of infectious diseases.*

Academic research on sanitation in Roma settlements in Slovakia links unequal access to water and sewerage infrastructure with multiple health risks.[16] *Informal or insecure housing also affects many Roma families. Some homes are built on land without clear legal status or construction permits, which makes families vulnerable to insecurity, exclusion from public investment and, in some cases, eviction. Although large-scale forced evictions are not as common as in some other countries, human rights organizations continue to report discrimination in access to municipal and social housing, short-term rental contracts, substandard housing and practices that reinforce segregation rather than integration.*[17]

Environmental hazards are closely connected to segregation. Some settlements are located near waste dumps, polluted areas, industrial zones, flood-risk areas or places without adequate waste management. Children living in these environments face a higher risk of illness and injury.[18] *A tragic example was the 2025 fires in a poor Roma settlement in eastern Slovakia, where several children died after a blaze destroyed homes in a settlement lacking basic services.*[19]

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[15] Roma Advocacy and Research Centre. 2023. *Slovakia – Roma Access to Quality and Affordable Housing.* Brussels: European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network. Available at: https://ergonetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/SLOVAKIA-Roma-access-to-quality-and-affordable-housing-final.pdf; Ferro, A. (ed.), 2023. Roma Access to Quality and Affordable Housing in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Spain**.** Brussels: European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network. Available at: https://ergonetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Ergo-2023-access-housing-WEB-V4.pdf; Kahanec, M. - Kováčová, L., 2020, The Social and Employment Situation of Roma Communities in Slovakia. Brussels: European Parliament, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies. Avialable at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/648778/IPOL_STU%282020%29648778_EN.pdf

[16] Filčák, R. – Škobla, D., 2021, Sanitation Infrastructure at the Systemic Edge: Segregated Roma Settlements and multiple health risks in Slovakia. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health, 18 (11), 60)79, available at: https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/11/6079

[17] Amnesty International Slovakia, 2024, Unattainable Right to Housing: Report on Right to Housing in Slovakia. Bratislava: Amnesty International Slovakia. Dostupné online: https://www.amnesty.sk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Housing-research-Slovakia-final.pdf

[18] Kahanec, M.- Kováčová, L., 2020. *The Social and Employment Situation of Roma Communities in Slovakia***.** Brussels: European Parliament, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/648778/IPOL_STU%282020%29648778_EN.pdf; Roma Civil Monitoring. 2024. Civil Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework in Slovakia. Budapest: Democracy Institute, Central European University & European Commission. Avialable at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/RCM2-2024-C1-Slovakia-FINAL-ISBN.pdf

[19] Hakl, R., 2025, Tri dievčatká a ich mama zahynuli pri požiari v Kozárovciach, len tohto roku v osadách uhorelo deväť detí. Aktuality,26.11.2025. available at: https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/t4CFlLH/tri-dievcatka-a-ich-mama-zahynuli-pri-poziari-v-kozarovciach-len-tohto-roku-v-osadach-uhorelo-devat-deti/

Roma children and healthcare

The health situation of Roma children and their families in Slovakia is shaped by poverty, poor housing conditions, limited access to healthcare services, and social exclusion. Research shows that children living in marginalized Roma communities experience worse health outcomes than the majority population from the earliest stages of life. Health inequalities often begin before birth and continue throughout childhood, affecting physical health, mental well-being, educational outcomes, and future life opportunities.[20] Access to antenatal and postnatal care remains a challenge for many Roma women, particularly those living in segregated settlements. Barriers include distance from healthcare facilities, lack of transportation, financial constraints, discrimination, and insufficient communication between healthcare providers and Roma communities.

These barriers can contribute to poorer maternal health and increase health risks for newborns. Studies have also identified higher infant mortality rates in socially excluded Roma communities compared with the general population.[21] Vaccination coverage among Roma children is generally lower than among non-Roma children. Barriers include limited access to healthcare providers, insufficient information, mistrust of institutions, transportation difficulties, and communication problems between health professionals and Roma families. Research on HPV vaccination in marginalized Roma communities in eastern Slovakia found that health systems often fail to provide culturally appropriate information and preventive services.[22] Healthy nutrition remains a significant concern.

Children living in poverty are more likely to experience food insecurity and have limited access to diverse and nutritious diets. Poor housing conditions and low household incomes often contribute to unhealthy eating patterns, increasing the risk of malnutrition, obesity, and related health problems. International organizations emphasize that nutritional deprivation remains one of the major health challenges affecting Roma children across Europe, including Slovakia.[23] Communicable diseases occur more frequently in marginalized Roma settlements because of overcrowded housing, inadequate sanitation, limited access to clean water, and poor environmental conditions. Studies in Slovakia have identified increased risks of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, respiratory infections, and gastrointestinal diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted existing inequalities in healthcare access and disease prevention.[24] Children with disabilities often face multiple disadvantages. In addition to barriers associated with disability itself, Roma children may encounter discrimination, limited access to specialized healthcare, rehabilitation services, and early intervention programmes.

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[20] Bobakova, D., et al, 2022. Desirable but not feasible: Measures and interventions to promote early childhood health and development in marginalized Roma communities in Slovakia. Lausanne: Frontiers Media SA. Available at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2022.942550/full

[21] Macek, P., et al., 2026). Too Young to Die: Social Inequalities and Infant Mortality in Segregated Roma Settlements in Slovakia. London: International Journal for Equity in Health. Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12963-026-00465-6

[22] UNICEF Europe and Central Asia, 2024. Roma Children. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/eca/programme/roma-children

[23] Eurochild, 2025. Voices of Roma Children Across Europe. Brussels: Eurochild. Available at: https://eurochild.org/uploads/2025/04/Eurochild-2024-Flagship-Sub-report-on-Roma-Children-across-Europe.pdf

[24] European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO). (2022). Roma Access to Quality, Inclusive and Affordable Health and Long-Term Care in Slovakia. Brussels: ERGO Network. Available at: https://ergonetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SLOVAKIA-Roma-access-to-health-and-long-term-care-final.pdf

Research suggests that healthcare and social support systems frequently fail to reach vulnerable families living in marginalized communities, resulting in delayed diagnosis and insufficient support. Mental health is an increasingly recognized issue. Studies conducted in marginalized Roma communities in Slovakia found that young children experience poorer mental health outcomes than children from the majority population. Researchers link these disparities to chronic stress, poverty, social exclusion, discrimination, insecure living conditions, and parental stress. Maternal stress has been identified as an important factor influencing children's emotional and behavioural development.[25] Sexual and reproductive health remains an area of concern. Roma adolescents often have limited access to comprehensive sexual education and reproductive health information. Early parenthood occurs more frequently in marginalized communities, while barriers to healthcare services reduce access to preventive care.[26]

Roma children and education

The educational situation of Roma children in Slovakia continues to be marked by significant inequalities. Despite improvements in access to education, Roma children remain more likely to experience educational disadvantage throughout their school careers. The main challenges include limited participation in early childhood education, school segregation, placement in special education, lower academic achievement, early school leaving, and lower rates of completion of secondary education.[27] A separate chapter is the existing antigypsyism. First, the system itself is set up in a discriminatory way towards Roma children from generational poverty, and the teachers themselves have antigypsyist behavior (despite the fact that they think that their behavior is not discriminatory). Also, the existing racism of classmates towards Roma children is a problem that the system cannot deal with effectively.

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in children's cognitive, social and language development. However, Roma children are less likely to attend preschool education than non-Roma children, particularly in marginalized communities where access may be limited by poverty, transportation barriers, insufficient kindergarten capacity, or administrative obstacles. Lower participation in early childhood education often leads to weaker school readiness and poorer educational outcomes later in life.[28] School segregation remains one of the most serious educational problems. Many Roma children attend schools or classes where Roma pupils constitute the majority of students.

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[25] Bobakova, D., et al, 2022. Desirable but not feasible: Measures and interventions to promote early childhood health and development in marginalized Roma communities in Slovakia. Lausanne: Frontiers Media SA. Available at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2022.942550/full ; Eurochild, 2024. Alarming Report on the Situation of Roma Children in Slovakia. Brussels: Eurochild. Available at: https://eurochild.org/news/alarming-report-on-the-situation-of-roma-children-in-slovakia/

[26] Filakovská Bobáková, D., Chovan, S., Van Laer, S., et al., 2024. Perceived Stress of Mothers, Harsh Discipline, and Early Childhood Mental Health: Insights from a Cross-Sectional Study in Marginalized Roma Communities. Basel: International Journal of Public Health. Available at: https://www.ssph-journal.org/journals/international-journal-of-public-health/articles/10.3389/ijph.2024.1606721/full

[27] European Commission, 2023. Roma Civil Monitoring Report on Slovakia. Brussels: European Commission. Available at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu ; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2021. Roma Survey 2021. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu

[28] UNICEF, 2024. Roma Children in Europe: Building Equal Opportunities. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/eca/programme/roma-children ; OECD, 2019. Enhancing the Social Integration of Roma in the Slovak Republic. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/slovakia/enhancing-the-social-integration-of-roma-in-the-slovak-republic.htm ; Roma Civil Monitor, 2025, available at: https://romadata.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/rcm2-2024-c1-slovakia-final-slovak.pdf

In some cases, residential segregation directly contributes to school segregation, while in others, school policies and parental school choices reinforce ethnic separation. Segregated education often results in lower educational quality, fewer resources, reduced expectations from teachers, and limited opportunities for interaction with non-Roma peers.[29]

Roma children are also disproportionately represented in special schools and classes designed for pupils with mild intellectual disabilities. International organizations have repeatedly criticized the overrepresentation of Roma children in special education, arguing that language barriers, cultural differences, biased assessment procedures, and social disadvantage are often misinterpreted as intellectual disability. Placement in special education significantly limits future educational and employment opportunities.[30] *Academic achievement among Roma pupils is generally lower than among the majority population. Studies attribute these differences primarily to poverty, overcrowded housing, limited access to educational resources, lower participation in preschool education, and the effects of segregation.*

Roma pupils are more likely to achieve lower grades, experience learning difficulties, and perform worse on standardized assessments.[31] *Early school leaving remains a significant challenge. Many Roma students leave school before completing upper secondary education due to economic hardship, segregated and lower quality of secondary education, family responsibilities, discrimination, and the cumulative effects of educational disadvantage. As a result, completion rates at the secondary level remain substantially lower among Roma youth than among the general population, reducing future employment opportunities and increasing the risk of intergenerational poverty.*[32]

Roma children and other services

Roma children in Slovakia often face unequal access to basic supporting services outside the classroom, especially when they live in segregated or remote localities. Services such as transport, school meals, counselling, afterschool activities and social support are formally available, but access is often limited by poverty, distance, local capacity, discrimination and weak coordination between schools, municipalities and social services. There are mostly provided in public community centres that are based in segregated Roma communities.[33]

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[29] Amnesty International, 2025. Slovakia: Segregation of Roma Children in Education. London: Amnesty International. Available at: https://www.amnesty.org ; Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024. Report on Human Rights in the Slovak Republic. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: https://www.coe.int

[30] European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), 2023. ECRI Report on Slovakia. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance ; European Court of Human Rights. Case Law on Roma Education and Discrimination. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: https://hudoc.echr.coe.int

[31] OECD. (2019). Enhancing the Social Integration of Roma in the Slovak Republic. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/slovakia/enhancing-the-social-integration-of-roma-in-the-slovak-republic.htm ; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). 2021. Roma Survey 2021. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu

[32] European Commission, 2023. Roma Civil Monitoring Report on Slovakia. Brussels: European Commission. Available at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu ; Eurofound. 2021. Roma Youth and Education in Europe. Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Available at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu

[33] OECD, 2019. Enhancing the Social Integration of Roma in the Slovak Republic. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/enhancing-the-social-integration-of-roma-in-slovak-republic_197eb309-en.html

Transport is a major barrier for many Roma children. Very often the public transport is unavailable, expensive or irregular, families may struggle to ensure regular attendance to the leisure activities or other afterschool duties. This affects especially younger children, children with disabilities and pupils attending schools outside segregated localities.[34]

Free school meals are an important form of support for Roma children living in poverty. For some children, school lunch may be the most regular cooked meal of the day. However, access can still be affected by school attendance, administrative requirements, school capacity, lack of canteens in some segregated schools, or the inability of families to pay related costs such as transport, school supplies or hygiene items.[35]

Counselling and psychological support are often insufficient for Roma children and families. Many schools lack enough school psychologists, special pedagogues, social pedagogues or assistants who understand the living conditions of marginalized Roma communities. As a result, learning difficulties, trauma, mental health needs, family stress or behavioural problems may not be identified early enough. Instead of receiving support, children may be labelled as "problematic" or placed in less inclusive forms of education.[36]

Support for Roma parents

The income situation of Roma parents in Slovakia is strongly influenced by lower employment rates, unstable labour market participation, low wages and a higher occurrence of discrimination. Many Roma families living in marginalized communities experience long-term poverty, which limits their ability to provide adequate housing, nutrition, educational resources and leisure opportunities for their children. Research consistently shows that labour market exclusion is one of the main factors contributing to the intergenerational transmission of poverty among Roma families.[37] *Because of low labour market participation, many Roma households rely partly on social assistance. Slovakia provides several family support measures, including child allowances, parental allowance, maternity benefits, housing-related support, activation allowances and assistance in material need.*

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[34] OECD, 2019. Enhancing the Social Integration of Roma in the Slovak Republic. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/enhancing-the-social-integration-of-roma-in-slovak-republic_197eb309-en.html / Roma Civil Monitoring, 2025. Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework in Slovakia. Budapest: Democracy Institute, Central European University. Available at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/countries/slovakia/

[35] Roma Civil Monitoring, 2025. Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework in Slovakia. Budapest: Democracy Institute, Central European University. Available at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/countries/slovakia/

[36] UNICEF, 2025. Technical Support for Education Desegregation of Roma Children in Slovakia. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/technical-support-education-desegregation-roma-children-slovakia / Amnesty International & European Roma Rights Centre, 2025. Separate and Unequal: School Segregation Persists for Roma in Slovakia. London and Budapest: Amnesty International & European Roma Rights Centre. Available at: https://www.errc.org/reports--submissions/separate-and-unequal-school-segregation-persists-for-roma-in-slovakia

[37] OECD. (2019). Enhancing the Social Integration of Roma in the Slovak Republic. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/enhancing-the-social-integration-of-roma-in-slovak-republic_197eb309-en.html / Kahanec, M., & Kováčová, L. (2020). *The Social and Employment Situation of Roma Communities in Slovakia*. Brussels: European Parliament, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/648778/IPOL_STU(2020)648778_EN.pdf

These benefits represent an important source of income for many vulnerable families and help reduce extreme poverty among children. However, social benefits alone are usually insufficient to lift families out of poverty, especially in larger households with several dependent children.[38] *Roma families are formally entitled to the same social benefits and family policies as all other citizens. These include parental leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, child benefits, childcare allowances and other family-oriented measures introduced under Slovak and European work-life balance policies.*

In practice, however, access is often complicated by administrative barriers, low awareness of available support, limited digital literacy, transportation difficulties and problems communicating with public institutions.[39] *Work-life balance measures are generally more accessible to parents who have stable formal employment. Since many Roma parents experience unemployment or precarious employment, they often benefit less from employment-based measures such as flexible working arrangements, paid parental leave schemes, remote work opportunities or employer-supported childcare. As a result, the gap between formally available rights and their practical use can be significant.*[40]

Childcare availability also affects parents' economic opportunities. In some marginalized localities, access to nurseries, kindergartens and after-school services remains limited. This particularly affects mothers, who often carry the primary responsibility for childcare and may therefore find it difficult to enter or remain in employment. Researchers identify improved access to affordable childcare as one of the most effective measures for increasing labour market participation among vulnerable families.[41] *An example of the economic vulnerability of Roma families can be seen in the high poverty rates recorded among households with children in marginalized Roma communities. Research based on EU-SILC data found that households with multiple dependent children and single-parent households face the highest risk of poverty.*

Families often combine social benefits, occasional employment, activation work and support from relatives to meet their basic needs. Community workers frequently report situations where parents must choose between transportation costs, food expenses and school-related costs for their children.[42]

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[38] Roma Civil Monitoring Report on Slovakia*, 2023*. Brussels: European Commission. Available at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu / OECD, 2019. *Enhancing the Social Integration of Roma in the Slovak Republic*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/enhancing-the-social-integration-of-roma-in-slovak-republic_197eb309-en.html

[39] Roma Civil Monitoring, 2025. *Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework in Slovakia*. Budapest: Democracy Institute, Central European University. Available at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/countries/slovakia/

[40] European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2023. Gender Equality and Work-Life Balance in the EU. Vilnius: European Institute for Gender Equality. Available at: https://eige.europa.eu / OECD. (2019). *Enhancing the Social Integration of Roma in the Slovak Republic*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/enhancing-the-social-integration-of-roma-in-slovak-republic_197eb309-en.html

[41] UNICEF. (2024). Roma Children in Europe: Building Equal Opportunities. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/eca/programme/roma-children

[42] 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

Roma children and antigypsyism

Roma children encounter antigypsyism in their everyday lives. Many report experiences of bullying, verbal abuse, stereotyping and social exclusion by peers. Negative portrayals of Roma in public discourse and media contribute to prejudice and reinforce discriminatory attitudes. Such experiences can undermine children's self-esteem, sense of belonging and mental well-being.[43]

In education, antigypsyism contributes to the continued segregation of Roma children in schools and classrooms. Many Roma pupils are educated in predominantly Roma schools or classes, often receiving lower-quality education and facing lower expectations from teachers. Research shows that stereotypes about Roma children's abilities can influence educational decisions, including placement in special education and reduced opportunities for academic advancement. These practices negatively affect educational achievement and future employment prospects.[44]

The lack of education about Roma history has broader consequences for both Roma and non-Roma children. When schools fail to provide accurate information about Roma history and culture, stereotypes and prejudices can remain unchallenged. Experts increasingly view the inclusion of Roma history in education as an important tool for combating antigypsyism, promoting intercultural understanding and strengthening social cohesion. Recent initiatives supported by the Council of Europe and Slovak authorities specifically emphasize the need to integrate Roma history into school curricula as a means of addressing discrimination and changing negative attitudes towards Roma communities.[45]

Antigypsyism also influences housing conditions. Discriminatory attitudes and practices have contributed to the persistence of segregated settlements, unequal access to municipal housing, and resistance to desegregation initiatives. Roma families may face discrimination when renting accommodation or applying for social housing. As a result, many Roma children grow up in environments characterized by poor infrastructure, overcrowding and spatial isolation from the majority population.[46]

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[43] UNICEF, 2024. Roma Children in Europe: Building Equal Opportunities. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/eca/programme/roma-children / Eurochild., 2024. Alarming Report on the Situation of Roma Children in Slovakia. Brussels: Eurochild. Available at: https://eurochild.org/news/alarming-report-on-the-situation-of-roma-children-in-slovakia/

[44] Amnesty International & European Roma Rights Centre, 2025. Separate and Unequal: School Segregation Persists for Roma in Slovakia. London and Budapest: Amnesty International & European Roma Rights Centre. Available at: https://www.errc.org/reports--submissions/separate-and-unequal-school-segregation-persists-for-roma-in-slovakia

[45] Council of Europe, 2025. Thematic Visit on the Inclusion of Roma History in School Curricula. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/-/adi-rom-group-of-experts-join-thematic-visit-on-inclusion-of-roma-history-in-school-curricula / UNICEF, 2025. Technical Support for Education Desegregation of Roma Children in Slovakia. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/technical-support-education-desegregation-roma-children-slovakia

[46] European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network , 2023. Slovakia – Roma Access to Quality and Affordable Housing. Brussels: European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network. Available at: https://ergonetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/SLOVAKIA-Roma-access-to-quality-and-affordable-housing-final.pdf / Amnesty International Slovakia, 2024. Unattainable Right to Housing: Report on the Right to Housing in Slovakia. Bratislava: Amnesty International Slovakia. Available at: https://www.amnesty.sk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Housing-research-Slovakia-final.pdf

In healthcare, Roma families frequently report experiences of discrimination, disrespectful treatment and unequal access to services. Such experiences may discourage families from seeking preventive healthcare, vaccinations or specialist treatment. Studies have found that distrust between Roma communities and institutions is often linked to previous experiences of exclusion and discrimination, which can worsen health inequalities.[47]

Access to public services is also be affected by antigypsyism. Even when services are formally available, negative attitudes, low trust in institutions and previous experiences of discrimination can create additional barriers to access. Practices have also been reported in some localities where, for example, a children's playground in a municipality was divided into separate days for Roma children and non-Roma children. Such a form of discrimination does nothing to promote a tolerant and inclusive society.[48]

In the area of legislation, there are also cases where laws are not explicitly targeted at Roma children, but in practice Roma children are the group most affected by them. An example is a legislative proposal introduced this year, under which the government proposed the permanent withdrawal of child benefits from parents whose children are repeatedly and persistently truant from school. However, existing legislation already provides sanctions for parents, including criminal penalties in certain cases. Therefore, such a proposal may be perceived as a manifestation of antigypsyism towards children, because in practice it is the children who would suffer the most. Without access to child benefits, many children would lose financial support needed for school supplies, educational materials, clothing, transportation, and other expenses related to school attendance.[49]

Prevention of Roma family separation

The removal of Roma children from their families is a sensitive and controversial issue in Slovakia. Officially, children cannot be removed solely because of poverty or poor housing conditions. Slovak child protection legislation requires that removal be based on concerns related to the child's safety, neglect, abuse, or serious risks to development. However, human rights organizations and researchers have repeatedly warned that poverty-related circumstances are sometimes interpreted as parental failure, which may place Roma families at greater risk of intervention by child protection authorities. Because Roma families are disproportionately affected by poverty, housing deprivation and social exclusion, they may be more likely to come into contact with social services and child protection systems.[50]

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[47] European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network , 2022. Roma Access to Quality, Inclusive and Affordable Health and Long-Term Care in Slovakia. Brussels: ERGO Network. Available at: https://ergonetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SLOVAKIA-Roma-access-to-health-and-long-term-care-final.pdf / European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021. Roma Survey 2021: Main Results. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/roma-survey-findings

[48] Roma Civil Monitoring, 2025. Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework in Slovakia. Budapest: Democracy Institute, Central European University. Available at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/countries/slovakia/

[49] Human rights coalition: Netrestajte deti za chudobu, vyzýva vládu Ľudskoprávna koalícia. 2026. Available at: https://romanoforum.dennikn.sk/netrestajte-deti-za-chudobu-vyzyva-vladu-ludsko-pravna-koalicia/

[50] European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC). (2024). Roma Rights in Europe: Child Protection and Family Separation. Budapest: European Roma Rights Centre. Available at: https://www.errc.org / Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. (2024). *Slovak Republic: Urgent Need to Address Human Rights of Roma and Adopt an Intergenerational Approach*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/slovak-republic-urgent-need-to-address-human-rights-of-roma-and-adopt-an-intergenerational-approach

At the same time, Slovakia has increasingly adopted policies aimed at preventing family separation and supporting children within their families. Child protection reforms emphasize deinstitutionalisation, family preservation, social work in communities, early intervention services and support for vulnerable parents. Community centres, field social workers, family assistants and social activation programmes are intended to help families address housing, education, health and parenting challenges before child removal becomes necessary.[51]

An important trend has been the gradual replacement of institutional care with foster care and family-based alternatives. International organizations generally regard this shift positively because children tend to achieve better developmental outcomes when raised in family environments rather than institutions. However, experts note that family support services remain unevenly available, particularly in marginalized communities where needs are often greatest.[52]

Existing research suggests that Roma families remain the group most vulnerable to the combined effects of poverty, social exclusion and antigypsyism in interactions with child welfare institutions.[53] *Reliable ethnic data on children in alternative care are limited because Slovakia does not systematically collect child protection statistics by ethnicity. Nevertheless, civil society organizations working with Roma communities have repeatedly reported concerns about the disproportionate representation of Roma children in residential care and foster systems. The absence of comprehensive ethnic data makes it difficult to determine the exact scale of the issue, but experts continue to call for improved monitoring and safeguards against discrimination.*[54]

A positive example comes from the municipality of Kuklov, where a family member adopted the child of his aunt because she was unable to care for the child adequately. Courts in Slovakia are generally supportive of such arrangements, as they allow the child to remain within the extended family network. This approach helps preserve family ties. Moreover, if the biological parents are still alive and later improve their circumstances, they may have the opportunity to rebuild their relationship with the child and become involved in the child's life again.[55] *This applies, for instance, to cases of addiction. The state then provides money for the child's upbringing in the form of a care allowance, and provides the parent with institutional treatment. Meanwhile, it is better for the child to stay with the extended family than to go to an orphanage.*

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[51] Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. (2022). National Strategy for Deinstitutionalisation of Social Services and Alternative Care. Bratislava: Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. Available at: https://www.employment.gov.sk / UNICEF Slovakia. (2024). *Family Support and Child Protection Reform in Slovakia*. Bratislava: UNICEF Slovakia. Available at: https://www.unicef.sk

[52] European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care. (2023). *Guidelines on Deinstitutionalisation and Family-Based Care*. Brussels: European Expert Group. Available at: https://www.deinstitutionalisation.com / UNICEF Slovakia. (2024). *Family Support and Child Protection Reform in Slovakia*. Bratislava: UNICEF Slovakia. Available at: https://www.unicef.sk

[53] Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. (2024). *Slovak Republic: Urgent Need to Address Human Rights of Roma and Adopt an Intergenerational Approach*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/slovak-republic-urgent-need-to-address-human-rights-of-roma-and-adopt-an-intergenerational-approach/ Roma Civil Monitoring. (2025). *Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework in Slovakia*. Budapest: Democracy Institute, Central European University. Available at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/countries/slovakia/

[54] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). (2021). *Roma Survey 2021: Main Results*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/roma-survey-findings

[55] Finding from to work of Roma advocacy and research centre

In another case, the mother also made use of the option to have her children placed in the care of another family member. As a result of her drug addiction, she was unable to provide adequate care and upbringing for her two children and asked her mother for help, as there was a risk that the children would be placed in institutional care. Together, they petitioned the court to place the children in the grandmother's care for the duration of the mother's treatment. Once the mother had successfully completed treatment, the children returned to her household.[56]

Participation and justice for Roma children

The participation of Roma children in civic life in Slovakia remains limited compared to that of the majority population. Although Roma children formally enjoy the same rights to participation as all other children under Slovak law and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, many face barriers related to poverty, segregation, discrimination and unequal access to educational and community opportunities.[57] *These barriers often reduce their ability to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives at school, in their communities and in public institutions.*

Participation in student councils and school self-government structures is often lower among Roma children, particularly in segregated schools or schools attended predominantly by Roma pupils. Student councils frequently have limited influence, and Roma pupils may feel that their voices are not valued or represented. In addition, lower self-confidence, experiences of discrimination and lower expectations from teachers may discourage active participation in leadership positions. Research on educational inclusion shows that meaningful participation is more likely in inclusive school environments where diversity is actively promoted.[58]

Roma children also face obstacles in accessing youth organizations, sports clubs, cultural associations and other civic participation opportunities. Participation often depends on transportation, parental financial resources, school support and the availability of activities in local communities. Children living in segregated settlements frequently have fewer opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities, volunteer work or youth-led initiatives than their non-Roma peers.[59]

Access to justice is another area where Roma children may face significant challenges. Although legal protections against discrimination exist, children and their families are often unaware of available complaint mechanisms and legal remedies. Financial barriers, lack of legal literacy, distrust of institutions and previous experiences of discrimination can discourage Roma families from seeking justice when their rights are violated.

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[56] Finding from to work of Roma advocacy and research centre

[57] UNICEF. (2024). Roma Children in Europe: Building Equal Opportunities. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/eca/programme/roma-children

[58] European Commission. (2025). *Education Desegregation of Roma Children in Slovakia*. Brussels: European Commission, Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support. Available at: https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu / UNICEF. (2025). Technical Support for Education Desegregation of Roma Children in Slovakia. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/technical-support-education-desegregation-roma-children-slovakia

[59] Eurochild. (2024). *Alarming Report on the Situation of Roma Children in Slovakia*. Brussels: Eurochild. Available at: https://eurochild.org/news/alarming-report-on-the-situation-of-roma-children-in-slovakia/ Gallová.-Krieglerová, E. – Havírová, Z. – Holka Chudžíková, A. , 2019. Šport ako cesta z gheta. CVEK. Available at: https://cvek.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Šport-ako-cesta-z-geta_final.pdf

Civil society organizations therefore play an important role in providing legal assistance and advocacy.[60] A positive example of youth engagement is the Youth Centre in Jarovnice, an initiative by the municipality. Although the centre is attended exclusively by Roma children and young people, it has contributed to a visible improvement in their social capital, self-confidence, and civic participation. An important aspect of this initiative is that the centre is led directly by Roma youth themselves. As a result, young people have a genuine role in decision-making and are actively involved in determining the direction, priorities and activities of the centre. This participatory approach strengthens their leadership skills, sense of responsibility, and ability to engage in community life.[61]

Roma children in the National Roma Strategic Framework

Slovakia's current National Roma Strategic Framework 2030 (Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030) contains several provisions directly relevant to Roma children. Children are not treated as a separate pillar of the strategy; however, their situation is addressed through the key areas of education, employment, housing, health, combating antigypsyism, and poverty reduction. The strategy explicitly recognizes that children living in marginalized Roma communities face a higher risk of poverty, social exclusion and unequal access to public services, and it identifies early intervention and support for families with children as important priorities.[62]

Although the framework contains comprehensive objectives, many experts argue that implementation remains the main challenge. Reports monitoring the strategy point out that some measures lack clear funding commitments, measurable indicators or strong enforcement mechanisms. Progress in reducing school segregation has been slower than expected, and improvements in housing and poverty reduction remain uneven across regions. Civil society organizations frequently stress that ambitious policy goals are not always matched by sufficient resources at the local level.[63]

One of the main weaknesses identified by researchers is that the strategy does not contain sufficiently strong child-specific targets. While children are addressed across several policy areas, there are relatively few indicators focused specifically on child poverty, child well-being, child participation or access to justice for Roma children. Experts therefore recommend introducing stronger child-centred monitoring mechanisms and collecting more detailed data on children's outcomes.[64] Another frequently mentioned gap concerns the limited focus on the participation of Roma children themselves.

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[60] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). (2021). Roma Survey 2021: Main Results. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/roma-survey-findings / European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC). (2024). *Strategic Litigation and Access to Justice for Roma Communities*. Budapest: European Roma Rights Centre. Available at: https://www.errc.org

[61] See more www.jarovnice.sk

[62] Government Office of the Slovak Republic. (2021). Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030. Bratislava: Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities. Available at: https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/strategia-2030/

[63] Roma Civil Monitoring. (2025). *Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework in Slovakia*. Budapest: Democracy Institute, Central European University. Available at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/countries/slovakia/

[64] Eurochild. (2024). *Alarming Report on the Situation of Roma Children in Slovakia*. Brussels: Eurochild. Available at: https://eurochild.org/news/alarming-report-on-the-situation-of-roma-children-in-slovakia/

Although the strategy promotes Roma participation in public life more generally, relatively little attention is given to mechanisms through which Roma children and young people can directly influence policies affecting them. Children's participation, representation in school governance, and involvement in local decision-making structures could be strengthened further.[65]

Roma children in the Child Guarantee – National Action Plan

Roma children are explicitly identified as one of the key target groups within Slovakia's National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee. The Action Plan recognizes that children living in marginalized Roma communities face significantly higher risks of poverty, social exclusion and unequal access to essential services. One of the main priorities of the Action Plan is increasing access to early childhood education and care for children from marginalized Roma communities. The document acknowledges that participation in preschool education is crucial for reducing educational inequalities and preventing future social exclusion. Measures therefore include expanding kindergarten capacities, reducing financial barriers, improving school readiness and increasing participation rates among children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Action Plan also addresses access to healthcare, healthy nutrition and housing. Several measures focus on strengthening community-based services, improving access to preventive healthcare, supporting healthy child development and reducing material deprivation among vulnerable families. The plan recognizes that many Roma children experience multiple and interconnected forms of disadvantage and therefore promotes integrated approaches involving education, social services and healthcare providers.[66]

Although Roma children are clearly recognized as a priority group, several monitoring reports question whether the measures are sufficiently ambitious to close existing inequalities. Experts point out that many objectives focus on improving access to services but pay less attention to structural issues such as segregation, discrimination and antigypsyism. Without addressing these root causes, progress may remain limited despite improvements in service provision.[67] *Experts generally conclude that stronger implementation mechanisms, clearer child-specific indicators, greater attention to segregation and discrimination, improved local capacities and more meaningful participation of Roma children themselves are still needed to achieve lasting change.*[68]

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[65] UNICEF Slovakia. (2024). *Youth Participation and Inclusion Programmes in Slovakia*. Bratislava: UNICEF Slovakia. Available at: https://www.unicef.sk / Council of Europe. (2022). *Child Participation Assessment Tool*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/child-participation-assessment-tool

[66] Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. (2022). *National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee in the Slovak Republic 2022–2030*. Bratislava: Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. Available at: https://www.employment.gov.sk

[67] Roma Civil Monitoring. (2025). *Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework in Slovakia*. Budapest: Democracy Institute, Central European University. Available at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/countries/slovakia/

[68] Eurochild. (2024). *Alarming Report on the Situation of Roma Children in Slovakia*. Brussels: Eurochild. Available at: https://eurochild.org/news/alarming-report-on-the-situation-of-roma-children-in-slovakia/ / Roma Civil Monitoring. (2025). *Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework in Slovakia*. Budapest: Democracy Institute, Central European University. Available at: https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/countries/slovakia/

Conclusion and Recommendations

The situation of Roma children in Slovakia continues to be shaped by persistent inequalities across multiple areas of life, including poverty, housing, health, education, access to services, participation, and protection from discrimination. While many Roma children grow up in integrated environments and successfully participate in mainstream society, a significant number living in marginalized Roma communities continue to face severe disadvantages that limit their opportunities and undermine their rights. Poverty remains one of the most significant challenges. Children in marginalized Roma communities experience disproportionately high rates of material deprivation, overcrowded housing, poor health outcomes, educational disadvantage and social exclusion. These inequalities are closely interconnected and are reinforced by structural factors such as residential segregation, limited access to quality services, low parental employment, and discrimination.

Education continues to be a key area of concern. Despite policy efforts, Roma children remain disproportionately affected by school segregation, overrepresentation in special education, lower educational attainment and early school leaving. Similar inequalities are evident in healthcare, housing and access to support services, where barriers related to poverty, distance, infrastructure and discrimination continue to limit opportunities for many children. Antigypsyism remains a cross-cutting factor affecting nearly every aspect of Roma children's lives. It contributes to segregation, unequal treatment, negative stereotypes, limited participation and reduced trust in public institutions.

While Slovakia has adopted important strategic frameworks, including the National Roma Strategic Framework 2030 and the National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee, implementation remains uneven and progress has been slower than expected in several key areas. At the same time, positive examples demonstrate that change is possible. Community-based services, youth participation initiatives, family support programmes and efforts to strengthen inclusive education have shown encouraging results. The growing emphasis on family preservation, deinstitutionalisation and Roma youth engagement provides important foundations for future progress.

Ultimately, improving the lives of Roma children requires a comprehensive child-centred approach that addresses both the immediate consequences of poverty and the structural causes of exclusion. Ensuring equal opportunities for Roma children is not only a matter of social inclusion but also of children's rights, social justice and the long-term development of Slovak society.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen efforts to reduce child poverty

- *Introduce targeted measures to reduce child poverty in marginalized Roma communities.*
- *Improve access to adequate income support, employment opportunities for parents and affordable childcare.*
- *Ensure that social benefits effectively protect children from material deprivation and are not withdrawn in ways that may further harm vulnerable children.*

2. Accelerate desegregation in education and housing

- *Implement stronger measures to eliminate school segregation and promote inclusive education.*
- *Prevent the creation of new segregated settlements and support integrated housing solutions.*
- *Ensure equal access to quality educational facilities, public services and infrastructure.*

3. Expand access to early childhood education and care

- *Remove financial, administrative and transportation barriers to participation.*
- *Strengthen outreach programmes supporting school readiness among disadvantaged children.*

4. Improve healthcare access and health outcomes

- *Improve access to preventive healthcare, vaccinations, maternal health services and mental health support.*
- *Address environmental health risks linked to poor housing and inadequate infrastructure.*

5. Strengthen family support and prevent unnecessary family separation

- *Expand early intervention services, field social work and family assistance programmes.*
- *Increase support for kinship care and family-based alternatives to institutional care.*

6. Combat antigypsyism and discrimination

- *Introduce systematic measures to address discrimination in education, healthcare, housing, employment and public services.*
- *Strengthen anti-discrimination training for professionals working with children.*
- *Improve the representation of Roma history and the Roma Holocaust in school curricula.*

7. Improve access to participation and justice

- *Create more opportunities for Roma children to participate in student councils, youth parliaments and local decision-making structures.*
- *Strengthen legal literacy and access to complaint mechanisms.*
- *Support Roma youth-led initiatives and leadership programmes.*

8. Strengthen implementation and monitoring

- *Introduce measurable child-specific indicators within the National Roma Strategic Framework and the Child Guarantee Action Plan.*
- *Improve data collection on child wellbeing while respecting human rights standards.*
- *Ensure sufficient and sustainable funding for local implementation and community-based services.*

9. Increase the participation of Roma children in policymaking

- *Involve Roma children and young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies affecting them.*
- *Support mechanisms that enable children to express their views and influence decisions at local, regional and national levels.*

10. Invest in long-term, integrated solutions

- *Promote coordinated action across education, housing, health, employment and social services.*
- *Prioritize long-term interventions that address the root causes of poverty and exclusion rather than short-term project-based solutions.*
- *Ensure that all policies affecting Roma children are guided by the principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation and the best interests of the child.*

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3. Amnesty International & European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC). (2025). *Separate and Unequal: School Segregation Persists for Roma in Slovakia*. London and Budapest: Amnesty International & European Roma Rights Centre. Available at: https://www.errc.org/reports--submissions/separate-and-unequal-school-segregation-persists-for-roma-in-slovakia
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