



UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

Slovakia 2018

Joint Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
The World Esperanto Youth Organization (TEJO) and the European Youth Forum (YFJ)

Introduction

Slovakia has made significant progress in Human Rights and National Minorities achievements since its last review, however despite the identified achievements, there are systematic challenges in respecting the anti-Discrimination Act, which remains largely under-implemented due to several factors.

According to Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Equality and non-discrimination are core principles of international human rights law.

As a multi-ethnic country Slovakia must create a suitable environment for the preservation and protection of national minorities.

In this context, we express our concern regarding the continued discrimination against Roma, existing prejudices against ethnic minorities, linguistic rights, and participation in political processes. By raising awareness among the public, we would like to emphasize the importance of promoting young people's active participation in democratic life, supporting structured youth organisations in inclusive participatory processes, and fostering cooperation among youth organisations.

1. Right to development of minorities

In conformity with the principle of equal treatment, discrimination on the grounds of sex, racial, national, or ethnic origin shall be prohibited in social security, healthcare, provision of goods and services, and in education.¹ Language and ethnic minorities are facing discrimination on many levels. Among the most notable is the one related to education and access to jobs and services. The Romani minority (approximately 2% of the country's population) in particular is fighting against prejudice, which prevents them from accessing basic opportunities. The disadvantaged conditions begin already in childhood, with Roma children enrolled in lower quality education institutions.²

A 2015 investigation by the ombudswoman found shortcomings in the way schools obtained consent from the parents of Romani students to enrol their children in special schools. The ombudswoman found that, in extreme cases, parents received material gifts for their consent.³

Recommendations:

¹ The Act No. 365/2004 on equal treatment in certain areas and protection against discrimination and the amendment of certain acts, "The Anti-discrimination Act"

² OHCHR, Roma exclusion and Discrimination of Roma children in education

³ pg. 26, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265684.pdf>

1. Develop a high-quality education system, including for linguistic minorities, so as not to damage their identity and at the same time provide them with education in the language in which they can best learn.
2. Provide education to children of the majority population on minorities, e.g. projects and school exchanges.
3. In the communities where a minority language is widespread, this language should be also optionally taught to all pupils to ensure a social cohesion based on mutual knowledge and respect.
4. The government must provide data on the percentage of Romani students in special schools as well as data on ethnicity. Manage school choice to avoid segregation and increased inequities. Providing full parental school choice can result in segregating students by ability, socio economic background and generate greater inequities across education systems
5. To ensure stronger political engagement and inclusion of youth organisations in policy development related to young people at risk of discrimination, including through the creation of structures and spaces for reflection and dialogue with young people who experience discrimination, together with other relevant stakeholders.

2. Linguistic rights

According to the 2011 census, Roma were the second largest ethnic minority with a population of 105,000. Experts estimated that the Romani population was between 350,000 and 500,000, with an atlas compiled by the UN Development Program (UNDP) in 2012 placing the number at 402,000. Observers attributed the discrepancy to self-identification by many Roma as Hungarians or Slovaks. As much as 53 percent of the Romani population resided in marginalised communities. The UNDP atlas identified 231 segregated rural settlements located, on average, less than one mile from neighbouring municipalities. According to the 2011 census, there were approximately 458,000 ethnic Hungarians living in the country.⁴ The use of languages other than the official language in official communications shall be determined by law.⁵

Recommendation:

1. To add an additional article in Slovakian State Language Law regarding protection of linguistic rights, including the right to receive official communication in minority languages.

3. Right to inclusion and non-discrimination

The active participation of young people in decision-making and activities at the local level is crucial if we are to build a more democratic and inclusive society. The essence of inclusion and active citizenship is to provide young people with the opportunity, space, and support for participating and influencing the decisions and being included in actions and activities that contribute to the quality of life in local communities and in the society as a whole.

⁴ pg.22, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265684.pdf>

⁵ CONSTITUTION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC Slovakia_Const_1992_am2015_en.pdf

Young people do not feel integrated in the society, they distrust the national institutions and approximately one third is planning to move abroad in the long-term.⁶ 80% of young people distrust the government, 67% distrust the courts, and 43% believe they have no influence on what is going on in the country.⁷ There is a strong sense of exclusion, possibly related to the government nationalism, among others.⁸

Recommendations:

1. To involve, in line with the rights-based approach, groups facing discrimination at all levels of the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies affecting them.
2. To promote greater dialogue and cooperation between the different institutional actors working with equality, non-discrimination, and youth, together with youth organisations.
3. To strengthen an inclusive school system that would allow full accessibility for minorities and provide an education promoting acceptance of diversity and minorities.

4. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

According to the Slovak Republic's Constitution, the right to be elected is given to citizens from the age of 21 years; young people's representation in the Slovak Republic's parliament has been low over a long-term period. Only 5 out of 150 Members of Parliament (MPs) were younger than 30 in 2012, out of which 4 were men and 1 a woman. This represented 3.33% out of the total number. The research "A first-voter's vote" was carried out on a sample of respondents aged 18 – 21 years, and tried to find out the interest of secondary school students in elections. The research revealed no interest (29.6%) or little interest (50.6%) in politics among this group of young people.⁹ Despite the undeniably positive developments of the last decade, gender inequality remains evident and visible in many areas of private and public life in the Slovak republic.¹⁰

No laws limit the participation of women and members of minorities in the political process, and they do participate. While there are small but increasing numbers of Romani mayors and members of local councils, Roma are still severely underrepresented in communal, provincial, and national elective bodies. The country's one Romani MP was not re-elected in March.¹¹

Recommendations:

1. Enhance young people's access to decision-making processes and encourage young people's full participation in the societal life.
2. Increase the representation of youth in decision-making positions in political and economic life.

⁶ <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20659438/one-quarter-of-young-people-wants-to-leave-slovakia-for-good.html>

⁷ Slovak Youth Forum, available at <https://mladez.sk/2017/09/27/prieskum-rady-mladeze-slovenska-tato-krajina-nie-je-pre-mladych/>

⁸ OHCHR, Hate crime, hate speech and increasing radicalization in political discourse and in the media

⁹ pg. 9 http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Slovakia_2014_Youth_Strategy.pdf

¹⁰ Slovakia_National_strategy_gender_equality_2014_2019_en.pdf

¹¹ pg. 14, 23 <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265684.pdf>



UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

3. Lower the age of candidacy to 18, aligning it with the legal voting age.
4. Foster mutual Solidarity between society and young people.
5. Gender mainstreaming in public policies, as the cross-sectional principle, should take possible gender differences into account and integrate gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies. Gender representation and gender responsive content - need to be taken into consideration in all phases of the policy-making process.

World Esperanto Youth Organization (TEJO) was founded in 1938 and is an umbrella structure of 42 youth organizations. Its mission is to fight against discrimination and to build an inclusive society, based on global understanding beyond language barriers, defending the cultural richness of language diversity and the language rights of everyone, with a special focus on language minorities, in the framework of youth rights and human rights.

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Slovak Member Organization (SKEJ) was founded in 2003 and became a member organization of TEJO in 2004. Its main focus is on international cooperation and support and creation of educational and cultural activities for youth using the international language Esperanto.

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The **European Youth Forum (YFJ)** is an independent platform of over 100 youth organisations in Europe, to which TEJO is a full member. Founded in 1996 and bringing together National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations, YFJ represents the common interests of tens of millions of young people in Europe.

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