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## PRESS RELEASE

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**The UN Committee criticises the Slovak Government for segregating Roma in education, housing and hospitals. The Government should also urgently compensate forcibly sterilised Roma women**

**The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has called on the Slovak Government to adopt a number of measures to improve the protection of the human rights of Roma minority in Slovakia. Discrimination against Roma - including segregation - persists in many areas of life, it said, and the government should significantly increase its efforts to eradicate it. Among other things, it called on the government to urgently compensate forcibly sterilized Roma women.**

The Committee [published](#) its findings and recommendations [after its August meeting](#) and discussion with the Slovak government delegation in Geneva. The Committee addressed a wide range of areas and issues related to the protection of the rights of racial and ethnic minorities. In doing so, it paid particular attention to the situation of the Roma minority.

Representatives of our NGO (Poradna) also attended the meeting of the Committee and discussed with its members the current situation concerning the protection of human rights of the Roma minority in Slovakia. Among them were also two Roma women who gave the Committee an insight into the situation in excluded Roma communities. Thus, the voice of Roma women was also heard at the meeting. In its findings, the Committee reflected on topics that we have been addressing for a long time, as well as on the systemic measures that we are proposing.

The Committee expressed concern about cases of police violence against the Roma minority in recent years and considers that the current body investigating cases in this area - the Office of the Inspection Service - is not sufficiently independent. It recommended that the Government create an independent body that would operate entirely outside the organisational structures of the Slovak Police Forces and the Ministry of Interior.

The Committee also critically assessed the situation of the Roma minority in the area of housing, considering the lack of access to basic infrastructure such as drinking water, as well as the residential segregation of many Roma communities, to be of concern. It believes that the Government should take targeted measures to eliminate residential segregation and prevent actions by local governments that may contribute to residential segregation.

The Committee also expressed concern about the persistent discrimination and segregation of Roma children in education, which it perceives as widespread and systemic. It encourages the Government to take effective measures, stressing that it should also eliminate segregation, which can arise spontaneously as a result of individual decisions and also contribute to social exclusion (*for instance as a result of decisions by majority parents to enrol their children in different schools, which contributes to the emergence of segregated 'Roma-only' schools*).

The Committee also paid specific attention to the persistence of discrimination against Roma women in hospitals, including their segregation in maternity wards, and stressed the need to take effective measures to prevent it. The Government should, inter alia, ensure that such manifestations are effectively investigated.

During its discussion with the Government delegation, the Committee also inquired at length about the steps taken by the Government to ensure justice for women who had been forcibly sterilized in the past. In its recommendations, the Committee encouraged the Government to compensate women harmed by this practice. The Committee said the specific method should be devised in discussion with the affected women. The Committee specifically asked the Government to inform it of the measures taken in this regard within one year at the latest. The Government must therefore act without delay, according to the Committee.

The Committee also assessed the observance of the rights of the Roma minority in the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, critically noting the disproportionately low level of vaccination of the Roma minority compared to the majority population, as well as the introduction of area quarantines in some Roma communities. It considered the situation of Roma children from excluded communities at the time of the introduction of distance education, to which they did not have equal access, to be worrying.

The Committee has also not bypassed the persistent gaps in access to justice in cases of racial discrimination. It is particularly critical of the excessive length of court proceedings in these cases. The Government should, in its view, step up its efforts to ensure that the domestic anti-discrimination law is effectively implemented in court practice. The Committee also considers the low number of discrimination cases in which victims have received legal representation from the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights (the national equality body) to be worrying and encourages change in this regard.

*"The UN Committee's findings confirm that discrimination in housing, education and health care remains a common part of the lives of many Roma men and women in Slovakia. Even though the Government acknowledges shortcomings in this area and declares efforts to change - based on our fieldwork, we know that in practice the situation is improving only very slowly. In many localities, we do not see any change at all. Many Roma living in marginalised communities continue to face deep poverty and social exclusion. Many Roma children are educated in segregated schools and many Roma women face humiliation and segregation in hospitals. Seeking justice in cases of discrimination in the Slovak courts is still unbelievably difficult task for Roma complainants. It is positive that the Government apologised last year for the practice of forced sterilisations. However, it is imperative to draw up and submit without delay a legislative proposal, on the basis of which the affected women could be effectively compensated,"*

Štefan Ivanco, Programme Coordinator of the Center Civil and Human Rights (Poradna), commented on the Committee's findings and recommendations.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) is a United Nations body of independent experts who oversee compliance by States Parties with a legally binding international treaty, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Committee assessed Slovakia's compliance with the Convention at a meeting with the Slovak government delegation on 16-17 August 2022 in Geneva. This was again after almost five years. The meeting was preceded by the submission of a periodic report by the Slovak Government describing the measures taken to protect human rights of racial minorities in recent years and the progress made in this area.

### **Related document:**

**Alternative report, which we submitted to the Committee before its meeting with the Government, is available at: <https://bit.ly/3Rmox0x>**

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**The Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradňa)** is a non-governmental grassroots organization based in Slovakia focused on the protection of human rights with particular emphasis on the rights of

minorities and protection from discrimination. Poradna has for a long time worked on the issue of discrimination against Roma ethnic minority in various areas of public life. It has also been active in the protection of reproductive rights and protection from police brutality. Poradna employs strategic litigation to combat discrimination and human rights abuses against minorities. Poradna offers free legal advice to victims of discrimination and in selected cases free legal representation to victims of discrimination before Slovak courts and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. It also conducts monitoring in the field, advocacy, and educational activities on the protection from discrimination for lay and expert audiences. Visit us at [www.poradna-prava.sk/en/](http://www.poradna-prava.sk/en/)

Support the work of Poradna with a [monetary donation](#).

### **Information about the project under which this press release was issued:**

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