



PRESS RELEASE

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The Slovak Government plans to eliminate double-shift operation at primary schools that educate disadvantaged Roma children. However, the chosen solutions deepen their segregation

The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic is currently paying attention to solving the problem of double-shift operation faced by some primary schools in Slovakia. The Ministry has published a call for applications for the founders of these schools. They can request funding from the Recovery Plan to address the problem by expanding school capacity. However, the human rights NGOs - Center for Civil and Human Rights and Amnesty International Slovakia point out that the two-shift operation concerns practically only primary schools near excluded Roma communities, which educate Roma children in a segregated manner. Further expansion of these schools is, in their view, contrary to national and international anti-discrimination legislation as well as recent judgments of the Slovak Supreme Court. The consequence of such an expansion will only be to further maintain and deepen the segregation of Roma children in these schools. The NGOs have therefore addressed a public appeal to government officials, asking them to take immediate steps to desegregate these schools.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic has announced a call for applications for funding to eliminate the double shift operation of primary schools as early as in August 2022. Its clearly stated goal is to expand the capacity of the schools concerned through new buildings, extensions, superstructures and renovations of existing buildings. Currently - as of 10 November 2023 - the Ministry has supported the project of one applicant, which is the municipality of village Ostrovany. The two-shift primary school in this municipality is attended exclusively by children from the local marginalised Roma community. The school is located directly in a part of the village inhabited by Roma.

In conjunction with this call, a further parallel call from the Ministry is open from May 2023 to provide funding to applicants to develop a project to remove double shift operation in primary schools. In both calls, the ministry is reallocating European Union funding from the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Slovakia.

In our public appeal to Slovak government officials, we do not question the need to eliminate the existing two-shift operation in primary schools. However, we emphasise that this problem really affects segregated Roma schools operating directly in or near marginalised communities. In our opinion, addressing it by expanding the capacity of these schools does not have the potential to contribute to the elimination of segregation of Roma children in education in Slovakia. On the contrary, it will perpetuate their segregation and ultimately deepen it.

In our view, the Slovak Government's chosen approach is in violation to the Government's objectives for desegregation of Roma children set out in the Recovery and Resilience Plan and its 2030 Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma men and women. It also violates existing national and international legislation to protect against discrimination. Last but not least, it contradicts the widely publicised judgments of the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic, which has repeatedly ruled that the

education of Roma children in an ethnically segregated school close to a marginalised Roma community amounts to discrimination against them on the ground of their ethnicity.

Another important fact is that the Slovak Ministry of Education is redistributing European Union funds from the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Slovakia to expand the capacity of segregated schools in the vicinity of marginalised Roma communities within the framework of relevant calls for proposals. In our view, this is contrary to EU law and will lead to sanctions by the European Commission. Notably, Slovakia has been facing a lawsuit from the European Commission in the EU Court of Justice since April 2023 for ineffectively addressing the problem of segregation of Roma children in the Slovak school system.

We call on the Slovak government officials to use EU funding from the Recovery Plan for primary education reforms in a way that consistently contributes to the desegregation of Roma children and the promotion of the diversity of children in primary schools. In our view, schools attended by Roma children from marginalised communities need to be desegregated. This effort requires planning and a systemic comprehensive approach, which will also lead to the elimination of the problem of double-shift operation in these schools.

Štefan Ivanco, Programme Coordinator of the grass-root Slovak NGO Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradňa) said:

"From the current approach to solving this problem, it seems as if the Slovak Ministry of education has completely resigned itself to desegregating Roma children in schools in or near marginalised communities. The further expansion of these schools will in a way perpetuate the segregation of Roma children in them, and the Ministry is apparently ignoring this fact. Also in the light of the final judgments of the Supreme Court, it is imperative that the Ministry comes up with other solutions. Slovak state authorities must provide comprehensive support to municipalities with segregated Roma schools in designing, funding and implementing effective desegregation measures."

Rado Sloboda, Director of Amnesty International Slovakia, said:

"The new Slovak government has an extraordinary opportunity to desegregate education in dozens of schools in Slovakia with a cash injection from the EU funds. It has both the list of schools in double-shift operation and the financial resources; all it has to do now is to allocating them to rigorously anti-segregation measures, including monitoring them. We remind the Slovak government and local governments that to provide a decent and quality education for all children, it is necessary to end segregation practices once and for all and not to confuse access to education in terms of proximity to one's home with the right to education."

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CONTACTS :

Štefan Ivanco – Programme Coordinator of Slovak grass root NGO Center for Civil and Human Rights; phone number.: + 421 908 695 531; e-mail: poradna@poradna-prava.sk

Daniela Mužíková – Media Communication Coordinator at Amnesty International Slovakia, phone number: + 421 940988174, e-mail: daniela.muzikova@amnesty.sk

The Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva) is a non-governmental organization based in Slovakia focused on the protection of human rights with particular emphasis on the rights of minorities and protection from discrimination. Poradňa 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. Poradňa employs strategic litigation to combat discrimination and human rights abuses against minorities. Poradňa offers free legal advice to victims of discrimination and in selected cases free legal representation to victims of discrimination before courts. It also conducts monitoring in the field, advocacy, and educational activities on the topic of protection from discrimination for lay and expert audiences. Visit us at www.poradna-prava.sk

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