

## Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

# Country Report: Slovak Republic

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December 2008

The EPASI project is a programme of analysis of educational programmes in fourteen European countries, designed to address various forms of social inequality. The project analysis was conducted in the period 2007 – 2009. This report is part of the overall project, details of which are at <http://www.epasi.eu>.

The analysis is intended to be used within the overall framework of the EPASI programme.

The project has been funded with support from the European Commission. Each report within the overall project is the responsibility of the named authors.

The EPASI project was conducted by the following institutions:

- The Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London
- Metropolitan University (UK) (Coordinator)
- Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West-Vlaanderen (Belgium)
- Univerzita Hradec Králové (Czech Republic)
- Montpellier III - Université Paul Valéry (France)
- Panepistimio Patron ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΠΑΤΡΩΝ (Greece)
- Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona (Spain)
- Malmö högskola (Sweden)



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## 1. Introduction: A Brief Historical Insight

Slavonic tribes coming mainly from the north and the east started settling down in Slovakia at the beginning of the fifth century. In the early eleventh century, the territory of Slovakia was being fought over by Poland, Bohemia and Hungary and it was finally united with Hungary, sharing its further destiny, with anti-Hungarian outbreaks occurring from time to time. In 1526 the Slovakia territory became incorporated into the Habsburg monarchy (while still being a part of Hungary). The process of hungarisation grew significantly in strength at the beginning of the twentieth century. The restoration of Slovakia (including re-establishing Slovak as a full-bodied language) is linked to the formation of Czechoslovakia in the year 1918. On the 1st January 1993 Czechoslovakia separated into two independent countries called the Czech Republic (Česká republika, Česko) and Slovak Republic (Slovenská republika, Slovensko).

Currently, 86 percent of the population on the territory of the Slovak Republic are Slovaks. The most numerous minority is Hungarian (11 percent of the population in Slovakia mainly in southern Slovakia). The other minorities on the territory are Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians and Roma people etc. One of the important aims of the whole Slovak education system is an effective implementation of multicultural education and education against prejudice and stereotypes.

## 2. Contemporary Slovak Educational System

The current structure of the Slovak educational system in terms of levels of education according to the *International Standard Classification of Education ISCED 1997* comprises the pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Pre-primary education is considered to be the first level of the education system and caters for children from 3 (sometimes even younger) to 6 years of age. The attendance is not compulsory. In the 2003/04 school year, the gross enrolment ratio (ratio of all children enrolled in kindergartens (*materská škola*) irrespective of age, ie including the children under 3 and over 5 years, from the total number of the population aged 3 - 5 years) was 90.8 percent (EURYDICE 2007).

The compulsory schooling takes ten years and lasts until the end of the school year in which the pupil attains the age of 16. Compulsory school attendance starts at the age of 6. Pupils start their attendance in primary schools (grades 1 - 4). Primary education takes four years, the subsequent lower secondary education (grades 5 - 9) takes 5 years. (EURYDICE 2007, 2008)

Most pupils complete compulsory schooling by finishing the first year of their upper secondary education in secondary schools (*gymnázium, stredná odborná škola or stredné odborné učilište*). The underachievers who finish the ninth year of schooling in basic schools earlier than in grade 9 or who fail to complete grade 9 complete the compulsory attendance in the basic school or in apprenticeship centres (*učilište*). Upon completing the fourth, sixth or eighth year of the basic school, pupils may transfer to grammar schools (*gymnázium*) and after the fourth year to dance conservatory (*tanečné konzervatórium*); these pupils complete their compulsory attendance upon completing the second year of upper secondary education. Compulsory education is free. The only admission requirement is the pupil's age. To be enrolled to the six - or eight - year grammar school (at the age of 10, 12), pupils must successfully complete the fourth or sixth year of basic education and pass the entrance examination. As for the enrolment to a 5 – year bilingual grammar school (at the age of 14), pupils must complete eight years of basic education and pass the entrance examination.

Upper secondary schools organise not only upper-secondary education but also post-secondary courses designed for the applicants who received secondary education with the school-leaving certificate. In the post-secondary course, students complete and deepen the received education to improve their skills for performing their occupation. They specialise in concrete activities or acquiring professional qualification skills in a field of study different from that in which they passed the school-leaving examination. As a rule, post-secondary education is organised in the form of a part-time course.

The higher education sector provides higher education courses at three levels: three- to four-year study leading to a Bachelor degree, Masters study programmes at the second level (*magister, inžinier, doktor medicíny*) and PhD study programmes at the third level.

As at 31/12/2006, the number of people aged 29 or under was 2,181,128 (40.4 percent of the total population). The number of children of compulsory school age (aged 6-15) was 634,190 (11.8 percent of the total population). The official language of instruction is Slovakian (the state language) and, in certain regions and municipalities, the language of the minorities (Hungarian, Ruthenian, Ukrainian, German or Bulgarian). The use of these national minority languages is allowed if more than 20 percent of citizens belong to the minority (using the latest census figures).

*The most frequently used minority language is Hungarian (which is used especially in southern Slovakia). Following this is the use of Ukrainian and Ruthenian languages (mostly in eastern Slovakia). Education in Hungarian and Ukrainian languages is at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels. Ruthenian Language and literature is as a subject at some primary schools. Besides mentioned minority languages also German and Bulgarian languages are used. In connection to the question of languages used by immigrants, due to the low degree of immigration to the Slovak Republic, this question has not yet been addressed. (EURYDICE 2007/08:5)*

The area of competence, organisation and tasks of the bodies of state administration in education (except higher education), municipalities, regions and the bodies of self-government in education are laid down in accordance with the following acts, particularly:

- *Act No.29./1984 – The School Act (on the system of primary and secondary education),*
- *Act No. 596/2003 of the Law Code on State Administration and Self-Government in Education,*
- *Act No. 597/2003 (on financing primary schools, secondary schools and school institutions).*

With regard to the Slovakian common roots, history, current demands and opportunities there has been a reform programme developed for the future. The programme is based mainly in a project *Millennium and the National Programme of Education*. It also responds to the expected needs and requirements in the near and distant future. It represents quite a big shift on the way to the complete reform strategy of changes, which are to be anchored in the new law on training and education. After the final adjustments, both the documents were submitted to the Government and Parliament and approved at the end of the year 2000.

### **3. Concept of education and National Programme of Education in the Slovak Republic**

It is a reform programme for the future – finalised project *Millennium and National programme of education in SR*, which has been developed with regard to the common roots, history and current demands and opportunities (EURYDICE 2007:5–6).

The programme both introduces certain direction or vision towards general and specific aims in education and introduces the procedure to reach these aims. It means a big shift on the way to the complete reform strategy of changes. During the school year 2006/2007 the government gradually implemented proposals of reforms from the Millennium by providing new policies in the following areas (EURYDICE 2007:5–6):

- special pedagogy guidance
- integrated pedagogy-psychological guidance: Proposals of new organisation and cooperation of guidance services focused on the prevention regarding behaviour of children from disadvantaged circumstances and children with special educational needs.
- pre-primary education: The main change regards the last year before compulsory school attendance – it will be free of charge. This change is supposed to increase the number of attending children especially of the socially disadvantaged children and to minimise differences in preparation for compulsory school attendance between children from different social circumstances.
- development of gifted and talented pupils: It regards the work of schools and classes for exceptionally gifted children in artistic and sport fields and it is closely connected to the Concept of basic art-oriented education. The aim of these concepts is to maximise the involvement of children in artistic and sport education during the children's free time.
- foreign language teaching: Language teaching will be compulsory from the third grade of primary schools pupils aged 8 – two years earlier than before the Programme. The aim is to increase the number of upper secondary schools graduates that will master two foreign languages and therefore will have a better position in the labour market.
- lifelong learning and guidance in the SR: The aim is to increase the number of adults involved in lifelong, further learning, professional training and developing new competencies.
- education of minorities and Roma children.
- teacher education.

All of these new concepts and laws aim to change the content of education, to improve teacher status, to use new methods and forms of work and mainly to support prevention against negative forms of behaviour in schools, to support intercultural education.

#### ***3.1 School Administration, Evaluation, Curricula and Assessment***

The central body of state administration to govern the execution of state administration in education and to control this execution is the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic (*MŠ SR*). Above all, it determines the network of education establishments and the principles of pedagogical management of schools. It works out financial and organisational issues of the education system development. General administration at regional levels is represented by the regional School Offices. Their seats and territorial areas of competence are identical with the seats and territorial areas of competence of the self-governing regions and the responsibilities are being administered by the self-governing regions at the local level. Regarding the responsibility for organising schools and the use of financial resources, only school institutions with the status of a legal entity have decision-making powers. Only State Inspectors have the responsibility to carry out the tasks of educational inspections, supervision of head teachers and external assessment of school classes (which are coeducational and made up of pupils of the same age mostly).

There are national curricula in Slovakia. The compulsory subjects are the same for all pupils. The individual educational curriculum plans offered must be approved by the Ministry of Education to be valid throughout the country. However, currently, there are available several types of curricula. Teachers are free to use the teaching methods and textbooks of their choice from a list approved by the Ministry of Education.

As for the pupil assessment, it is the teachers who are responsible for carrying it out. They decide whether the pupils with study problems must repeat the studied year. The assessments are organised throughout the school year (written and oral tests). Pupils are given a certificate at the end of the first term and at the end of each school year. At the end of the ninth year of *základná škola*, a certificate is awarded on the basis of the pupil's school results (with no final examination). As for the pupil assessment at secondary schools, the arrangements are the same as in basic schools. The certificate awarded for passing the final examination, called *maturitná skúška*, which is organised by all secondary schools (with the exception of apprenticeship centres), represents the minimum entrance requirement for higher education.

### **3.2 System of Care and Conceptualisation of SEN**

Most children with special educational needs (SEN)<sup>1</sup> currently attend special schools. The structure of special education in these schools is very similar to that of the mainstream education. The education of children with SEN is carried out from pre-primary level up to the upper secondary level in special or mainstream schools. In the mainstream schools, the child with special educational needs may be integrated with its healthy peers into a mainstream class (individual integration) or into a special class at the mainstream school among other children with the same kind of disability (social integration). In the school year 2003/04 the ratio of pupils with SEN in the total number of pupils in compulsory education (697,838 pupils) was 4.8 percent; pupils educated separately (in special schools and in special classes of mainstream schools) represent 3.6 percent, the individually integrated represent 1.2 percent ratio.

The concept and category pupils with SEN includes pupils with mental or physical disabilities, hearing and visual impairments, pupils with any deteriorated state of health or illness, pupils having communication ability disorders, autistic pupils/pupils with autism, pupils with developmental learning or behaviour disorders, pupils with serious mental handicaps in social service healthcare centres, pupils with disorders in the area of mental and social development and pupils with high intellectual abilities. These specific groups are provided with the form of education especially suited to their special education needs while using specific individually suited methods. In Slovakia there is granted the right for education in sign language and in Braille for children in need.

Special schools provide education for pupils with SEN who due to their disadvantages are not able to pass education in mainstream schools. Pupils with SEN are educated using specific forms, methods and assistance aids in order to enable the pupils to fully participate in their working life as well as in the social life generally. There are several types of special schools:

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<sup>1</sup> The term children with special educational needs (SEN) is a term of quite a recent usage in Slovakia. There is a tendency to apply this term, which has its roots mainly in the current progress of the Slovakian special pedagogy, related discourse and progress in the area of intercultural education, and more complex approach to this type of inequality. Formerly, there used to be applied terms, such as disabled/handicapped etc. However, even nowadays these terms appear. These remnants of the 'communist system' of special pedagogy appear nowadays despite positive shifts in the special-pedagogical approach which have taken place in Slovakia in recent decades. The terms disabled/handicapped seem to have their roots in the continuous, evolutionary terminological development in the field of disability inequalities in Slovakia. Although this way of referring to inequalities by using "inequality attributes" (eg: disabled and handicapped) might be interpreted as a basis for attributing the inequality to the human being itself as the basis for discrimination of 'disabled persons'. However, it would be a simplistic truism. The grounds for this usage and point of view seem to come partly from the evolutionary, not revolutionary, process of democratisation of the society, secondly from the less intense attention that is paid to linguistic sensitiveness to these issues so far. Partially, the contemporary appearance of the "older" terminology might be interpreted as an indicator of the still persisting and rather subconscious view of persons with these inequalities as of people in need of help.

- a) special basic schools,
- b) special secondary schools (secondary apprenticeship centres, secondary grammar schools, secondary vocational schools),
- c) practical schools,
- d) apprenticeship schools.

### **3.3 School Integration and Its Forms**

School integration in the Slovak Republic is perceived as education and schooling for pupils with special needs in the school classes defined as such by the School Act, with the exception of special school classes. There are two basic forms of school integration:

- a) special class integration – in primary and secondary schools with separate special classes. For the pupils with SEN, there is a possibility of sharing lessons with the other pupils with both the class teachers present. In addition, some of the lessons can be attended outside the special class.
- b) individual integration – pupils with SEN are taught together with other pupils of the school within an individual educational curriculum plan and using specific SEN suited methods.

Apart from being educated in a special school, there are more integration-based options available for pupils with health disabilities: in a basic school special class, in a secondary school special class or in a regular basic school class or in a regular secondary school class.

## **4. Introductory Notes on EPASI Project Areas**

Out of the seven areas investigated in the EPASI Project, the issue perceived by the Slovak Republic most palpably is integration of Roma people. Roma people integration concerns multi-factor disadvantages, in particularly ethnic, national, socio-economic and linguistic minority disadvantages. Further, from the EPASI project targeted areas, based on the projects and educational activities analysis, there are quite intensely covered areas of disability and gender. However, these introductory notes include brief comments on all of the EPASI areas.

### ***Socio economic***

Socio-economic disadvantage stands for one of the widest problems in the Slovak Republic. Although the share of low-income households has gradually declined during the decades following the Velvet Revolution in 1989, this tendency has been accompanied by a greater discrepancy between net monthly income and real costs per member in such households. (In the Slovak Republic, low-income households in the sense of those whose net monthly income does not exceed the defined minimum subsistence level.) In none of the observed years did the net monthly incomes cover the expenses of low-income households. This means that they were dependent mainly upon savings, loans, self-help and, in times of extreme need, on the sale of property. Low-income households spend 60 percent of their money on housing. In most cases, the remainder is needed for food. In practice, this way of life leads to a strategy of survival and unhealthy sustenance. (Radičová and Potůček 1997)

Socio economic disadvantage seems to be one of the key disadvantages that lie within the roots of difficulties that must be faced by the Roma population. One issue facing Roma people is educational segregation, though this phenomenon does not have its roots within the education itself. The strongest reason is socio-economic and the socio-cultural conditions of the Roma population. For projects and case studies focusing on this theme see projects: [SK185](#), [SK187](#), [SK188](#), [SK189](#), [SK190](#), [SK191](#), [SK193](#), [SK195](#), [SK201](#) and case studies: [SK1](#), [SK2](#).

### ***Ethnic, linguistic and indigenous minorities***

The Slovak population comprises more than 11 national minorities which together represent approximately 15 percent of the total population in the country. The national structure of the Slovak population consists of Slovaks (85.8 percent), Hungarians (9.7 percent), Roma (1.7 percent), Ruthenians (0.4 percent), Czechs (0.8 percent), Ukrainians (0.2 percent), Germans (0.1 percent), Poles (0.1 percent), other (0.3 percent) (with about 1 percent unidentified) (Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky 2001). In accordance with the *Slovak Constitution* the national minorities have the right to be educated in their mother tongue.

The most intense attention seems to be paid to the Roma people. There are projects and grants aimed to provide support for the Roma language (see projects [SK187](#), [SK188](#), [SK190](#), [SK191](#), [SK193](#), [SK195](#), [SK201](#), and case studies [SK1](#), [SK2](#)). However, the Roma language is not the only target language (see projects SK184: [New minorities and us](#) and SK185: [All different – all equal](#)). According to the education Act No. 29 of 1984 on public education, which was modified several times, and whose full text was published in 1994, Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education can use the language of the minority as the medium of instruction (minorities specified: Czech, Hungarian, German, Polish, Ukrainian). The Act Number 542 of 1990, modified by Act of 1999, makes issuing of bilingual school documentation (including school reports) possible again from 1999. According to the regulation of the Ministry of Education regarding secondary school entrance examinations, students graduating from minority language basic schools who apply for a Slovak language secondary school take their entrance examinations in basic subjects in the language of instruction of their basic school. The key legislation on education of the Slovak Republic citizens from minorities in Slovakia that guarantees the right for education for their children is represented by the constitutional law No. 460/1992, the Constitution of the Slovak republic, law No. 29/1984 on the system of basic and secondary schools (School Act) and the law No. 184/199 on the use of national minorities' languages; law 270/1995 on official language of the Slovak republic, law No 596/2003 on state administration in the school system and school self-government, in particular (see page 4 above).

Indigenous minorities appear to be difficult to identify in the Slovak Republic. Though having consulted experts on demography, it is difficult to find a truly relevant group. From a certain point of view the term indigenous people might include the Roma people. However, the Roma people are usually referred to as persons with socio-economic and linguistic inequalities. Apart from this there are some cases where Roma people are viewed as autochthonous people as is done in a report by the Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture (CVEK 2008). CVEK focuses some analyses concerning attitudes of primary school pupils toward the autochthonous and new minorities and related issues of their integration in Slovakia: According to several analyses conducted in Slovakia, the education system is still relatively ethnocentric. Integration of autochthonous as well as of the so-called new minorities is so far failing also due to school system. School curricula do not reflect the cultural diversity of Slovakia and school-texts are practically free of information on national and new minorities. This is clearly influencing both chances of integration of other ethnic groups and processes of majority population attitude formation. Integration into the society is not possible without acceptance of minorities by the majority. Multicultural education as a topic incorporating issues of cultural diversity into the educational system might be an effective tool for the integration of these minorities (CVEK 2008). For projects focusing on the ethnic theme see projects: [SK184](#), [SK185](#), [SK187](#), [SK188](#), [SK189](#), [SK190](#), [SK195](#), [SK201](#).

### ***Disability, gender and religious minorities***

In the area of disabilities there are efforts to care for the children with a maximum respect for their type of disadvantage. However, there are still evident effects and consequences of a long tradition of the centralised special education system functioning on the principle of allocated financial



means. The Slovak Republic tries to improve the system of care in this area of disadvantage as many other post-communist countries do. In the times of the communist regime there developed the highly segregated system of education in the field of persons with disabilities which represents a hindrance to progress of integration/including the persons' with disabilities in a full social life. The deepest impact of segregated education, which persists today, appeared to lie in the development of social relations; the majority society learned to perceive persons with disabilities as the 'other', 'extraordinary' in the rather pejorative sense. The segregated system taught the majority society 'indifference' or 'negative attitude based on prejudice and stereotypes'. On the grounds of this development, the further differentiation of special schools and the development of special teaching techniques have become ineffective as the only means of attaining better results.

Nowadays Slovakia works on modifying the whole framework of education and teaching instruction of children and youth with disabilities (see projects [SK192](#), [SK194](#), [SK196](#), [SK199](#), [SK203](#), and case study [SK1](#)). The key starting point has been a complex diagnostic approach focusing not only the level and type of disability but also, and mainly, a complex diagnosis of the physical and psychic state of personality development with a view of the individual influence of disability and self-regulation including the family environment as well as the level of family education (see project SK200: [New diagnostic programme HAMET2](#)). Consequently there started to be applied the term child (person) with special educational needs (SEN).

The gender issues and the position of women in the society appears to be quite a recent issue as another typical feature of post-communist countries. On the basis of a detailed analysis of projects and educational activities that are gender-oriented, it proves to be quite a frequent topic in Slovakia nowadays. However, the frequency concerns rather the private, NGO and European-based subjects, obviously at the level of initiative. For projects focusing on the gender theme see project and case studies: [SK185](#), [SK186](#), [SK197](#), [SK198](#), [SK202](#), [SK4](#).

As for the religious minorities this issue does not seem to constitute any kind of a serious problem in the Slovak Republic. The Slovak population is quite homogeneous as far as their religion is concerned. The Slovak Republic has a big ratio of Catholic believers (app. 60 percent), with far fewer protestants (app. 8 percent). Other denominations constitute approx. 21 percent of the population. Only about 10 percent are atheists. In the field of religious education and religious schools it is necessary to mention one key document, *Agreement of the Slovak Republic, Registered Churches and Religious Societies on Religious Education*, that is *Agreement between Slovak Republic and Eleven Churches*. This document gives parents as well as other people and institutions the right to raise children in accordance with religious and moral principles peculiar to their own registered church or religious society.

### ***More on National Minorities Education and Schooling***

The education and schooling of national minorities is provided by pre-primary institutions, primary schools, secondary schools, special schools and school institutions with the language of instruction or teaching the language of the Hungarian, Ukrainian, Ruthenian and German national minorities. At the same time, education and schooling is provided for the Roma community members and for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

The area of the Roma children and pupil education and schooling within the context of life-long education is considered one of the priorities and it seems to be the key issue for dealing with various problems related to the general life situation of the Roma population. This fact is often reflected in both national and international reports or in other documents and regulations (see for example the Ministry of Education of SR documents). The European Union assistance both before and after the Slovak Republic accession is significant also for the Roma children and youth educational programmes. The assistance before the accession was realised within the PHARE programme

framework and then, after the accession, it was transferred under the ESF. The main direction of the education policy of the Roma population is based on the approved *Roma Children and Youth Education and Schooling Policy* regulation (2001) and also follows the principles stated in the *Roma Population Integration Decade 2005–2015* (further on referred to as the *Decade*). These steps are described in more detail in the following section.

Another event in this field is a book published by the Ministry of Education of SR in cooperation with Sweden, entitled *Katici* by the Swedish-Roma writer Katarina Taikon (illustrated by pupils from a basic school in Jarovnice). This book on relationships among people, understanding and tolerance in Slovak and Hungarian was distributed through the Ministry of Education of SR regional departments into 367 kindergartens, 1,560 primary schools and free time centres, psychological prevention centres and pedagogical counselling centres.

Some of the coordinated activities include for example the Primary School Zero Grade and Teaching Assistants Support. These programmes focus one of the crucial issues - enrolling Roma children into special primary schools for “mentally handicapped” children. This issue and other associated questions have been in the centre of Ministry’s attention for several years.

Roma children’s education in special schools and other special education institutions is assessed according to the criteria valid for all children and pupils in the special education needs category according to § 3 Par.2 Act No. 29/1984 (the School Act) on primary and secondary school system. The conditions for Roma pupils in special schools, enrolled there because of their health disabilities, illnesses or developmental disorders are identical with those of intact pupils. The prevailing high numbers of Roma pupils in special schools for mentally handicapped (see above, footnote 1) children was a result of the standard method of testing of school maturity and IQ levels which disregarded the children’s background. However, in 2004, new tests were developed, based on a Phare 2001 project (School Maturity Test for Socially Handicapped Children). New testing batteries were designed or modified and launched into practical usage to improve the inadequacies in testing methods in this area (see also [HAMET 2](#) in the projects).

Another reason for the higher number of mentally handicapped (see above, footnote 1) children in the Roma population is the observable separation and seclusion, the segregation of their communities, which might lead to unfavourable conditions for raising children, including a higher occurrence of negative genetic dispositions too.

From the population census in 1991 and the population census in 2001 it is possible to analyse the numbers of people in the Slovak population according to two factors: nationality and the highest attained educational level. The data relevant for the Roma population are shown in the following table.

**The highest attained educational level within the Roma population**

	Census 1991		Census 2001	
		%		%
basic – compulsory (including incomplete)	32,931	43.44	40,831	45.40
upper secondary	4,091	5.9	8,030	8.93
tertiary	56	0.07	174	0.19
no school education	4,579	6.04	1,963	2.18
no data about school education	1,287	1.69	2,204	2.45
children under 16 years of age	32,858	43.34	36,718	40.83
Total	75,802	100	89,920	100

(source: Demografická charakteristika rómskej populácie v SR, 2001)

The table demonstrates an upward trend at all levels of education. The only downward trend is observable at the number of people with no school education, which obviously is a positive effect.

## **5. The Roma Children and Pupils' Education and Schooling Policy**

This policy introduces one of the first complex solutions to the problem. It was prepared in accordance with the long-term Slovak Republic Education and Schooling Policy, which further corresponds with the *Millennium* and the *National Education and Schooling Programme in the Slovak Republic* for the next fifteen to twenty years. The *Programme Declaration by the Government of the Slovak Republic* also corresponds with this policy and there are also favourable social and political conditions for its successful realisation in the school practice.

This policy takes into account all the specific ages and individual features characterising Roma children and pupils from less advantaged family and social backgrounds. It lists the possible ways of overcoming bias, stereotypes and prejudices, minimising negative influences and effects of poverty culture and of the language and communication barriers. Its aim is to encourage the creation of a positive attitude to education, duties, and responsibilities for the social and cultural values in the long-term for education and community education. It covers all the education system levels – pre-primary education, compulsory school attendance, upper secondary and tertiary education. It also reflects the preparation and further education for the pedagogical staff involved in Roma children's education and schooling, and, last but not least, making Roma parents and the community involved in their children's education and schooling. The policy is open to additional supplements applying the latest information and trends. The key aim is to increase the number of the active participation of Roma children in the education system and thus to increase their education level.

During 2002, the policy was commented on by the other departments of the Ministry of Education of SR and in general it was assessed positively. The main measures that were taken as a part of the policy include for example Act No. 658/2002, changing and providing supplements to Act. No. 281/2002 on child allowance and additional contributions to child allowance in the case of neglected compulsory school attendance.

The educational policy also offers programmes for Roma children between 6 and 15 years, whose parents failed to be viewed in need of asylum in countries of Western Europe, especially between the years 1998 and 2001. Since 2000, the Ministry of Education of SR in cooperation with the International Migration Organization (IOM) have been dealing with the problem of re-enrolling these children back in the basic schools in the Slovak Republic. The beginning of the year 2000 was marked by launching a project in accordance with the Roma Children and Pupils Education and Schooling Policy. The project was entitled the *Cooperation of the Roma Parents and Schools in the Areas of Education, Schooling and Communication*. Its target group was basic school pupils aged 6 to 15, their parents and their teachers. It was designed to encourage the pupils' parents interest in their children's education by participating in workshops on motivational learning aids and, at the same time, to improve the parent-school cooperation and communication about education within the families themselves. In the year 2003, five basic schools in the Košice Region (the region with highest migration wave) took part in the project.

### ***Decade of the Roma Population Integration 2005 – 2015***

In order to improve the Roma population's situation in the society, The Roma Integration Population Decade 2005–2015 was declared and approved by nine countries of central and southeast Europe and backed by the international community. It is the first joint effort to change the lives of the Roma people in Europe. The Decade serves as an action framework for the governments and monitors the progress of accelerating social integration and improving the social status of the Roma in the region.

The preparations for the Decade in each country identified a set number of partial aims characteristic of each country to improve the situation. To be able to do so, the Slovak Republic approved the *National Action Programme of the Roma Population Integration 2005–2015*. Its education base is created by the *Integrated Education Programme for the Roma Children and Youth*, including developing the secondary and tertiary levels, and it is approved by the government of the Slovak Republic. The Decade is controlled by the International Control Committee consisting of government representatives, representatives of the Roma and international organisations. There are four defined priority areas: education, employment, healthcare and living. The Control Committee also stated three common issues: poverty, discrimination and clan (lineage) matters.

## **6. A Summary of Educational Disadvantage in Slovakia Today**

Although Slovakia has made a considerable shift on the way towards a democratic society with respect for various minorities there are still many observable disadvantages these minorities must face. As for the EPASI project it was agreed that the discussed minorities and their disadvantages will be discussed and considered from the perspective of the following seven indicators:

- literacy levels, reading literacy in particular,
- exclusion/expulsion rates,
- attainment levels of education,
- continuing in post compulsory education,
- participation rate in higher education,
- employment rates,
- evidence of social exclusion, being bullied etc.

However, despite the effort to consider these indicators and to discuss the minorities' educational disadvantages systemically it must be noted that conclusive and/or reliable data relevant for the disadvantaged groups was not always available in relation to these indicators. Therefore in some cases it is possible only to deduce from statistics collected rather generally apart from the minorities. The biggest difficulties, apart from the indigenous minority being viewed as a socioeconomic, linguistic or ethnic minority, appeared in relation to the ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. Due to these difficulties, some of the indicators (because some others are not available at all) are introduced as a characteristic feature of the Slovak Republic as a whole, apart from the minorities.

From the indicators of inequalities observable and provable in the Slovak Republic there seem to be some of crucial importance. Some of the indicators are presented and discussed together with some others below; on the other hand some others are omitted (where little data is available).

Generally and with relevance to the indicators discussed in this part it should be mentioned that both on the bases of the structure of educational pathways or possible educational routes and on the bases of statistical findings by the 2003 PISA mathematics results Slovakia belongs to countries with quite highly stratified education systems. The high educational stratification also has a connection to social and educational exclusion (and quite high exclusion/expulsion rates) and to lower attainment levels of post-compulsory education within the socio-economic minorities.

The high stratification of the education system firstly leads to and is supported by students being sorted and selected already at a young age (10). Secondly, academic (grammar school) and vocational education are separately provided. Approximately 25 percent of each cohort enters the academic track (grammar schools) and a further 55 percent enters the advanced vocational track that also leads to upper secondary qualifications for entry to tertiary-type-A studies. The selection is mainly based on ability, with the best students going to grammar school. The least able go to

vocational secondary school, which does not give access to tertiary education. Those in between go to technical secondary school. Within tracks, students are also sorted according to performance. The stratification of the education system concerns also the scores between schools and the impact of socio-economic background on students' scores. On the grounds of the high proportion of the variation in socio-economic background between schools it might be said that children from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds tend to enter tracks of better preparation for higher education whereas children from the disadvantaged backgrounds do not (CAREY 2007).

As for the tertiary education and tertiary attainment, which is relevant to the post-compulsory education participation rates, it must be noted that tertiary attainment is rising in Slovakia but remains well below the OECD average. Only 12 percent of the population aged 25-64 has completed tertiary education compared with an OECD average of 25 percent. This proportion is still only 14 percent for the 25-34 age group compared with an OECD average of 31 percent. Moreover, tertiary graduation rates in 2004, mostly from relatively long (5-6 years) programmes, were still considerably lower than the OECD average. Low tertiary attainment may be partly attributable to weak incentives to obtain tertiary qualifications until recently. It might be due to: low difference between the gross earnings of persons with tertiary-type-A attainment with earnings for persons with upper secondary attainment, for example. Another factor may be the limited supply of tertiary-type-B programmes, which are shorter than type-A programmes, more occupationally oriented and usually lead to direct access to the labour market (CAREY 2007:8). However, the below OECD average net entry rate into tertiary-type A programmes in Slovakia contrasts with the high graduation rate from secondary programmes designed to prepare students for such studies. While there are also other countries (Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Japan, and Turkey) in which a large proportion of students qualified for such studies do not undertake them, these countries tend to have high net entry rates into tertiary-Type-B programmes, in contrast to Slovakia (CAREY 2007:1).

On the other hand, what has reached above the OECD average and is closely connected to the indicator of evidence of social exclusion, is the link between the socio-economic background of the Slovak students and their performance. (PISA 2006, In Balogová 2007). Firstly there has been confirmed a positive correlation between the level of pre-school activities of parents and their children and between the performance of the pupils at reading. The research also confirms that there is a relation between pupils' performance and their educational conditions in their family background (for example: computer, existence of his/her own table, books, number of children's books in the household etc.) (PIRLS 2006).

Another kind of evidence of the socially based educational disadvantage of the socio-economic minorities lies in another extremely low indicator - in the education attainment of the Roma population. According to the 2001 population census, three quarters of Roma only had primary school attainment or less, compared with about one quarter for the rest of the population. Only 2 percent of Roma had completed upper secondary school and almost none held tertiary qualifications. Attainment remains weak for young cohorts of Roma. Most Roma graduates of primary school do not take any vocational training and do not build any professional career (Dluhošová 2005, In Carey 2007:12). For these reasons there is a high unemployment rate among the Roma population. According to estimates there are some local regions with about 80 or 90 percent unemployed Roma people among the employable Roma population. A high percentage of young Roma people never enter the labour market partly due to their low qualifications and partly due to their low interest in the second-rate jobs that are available. As a consequence there might appear the phenomenon of dependency on welfare benefits or criminal offence (thievery etc.).

Further evidence of social and educational disadvantage of lower socio-economic groups is provided by the 2006 PISA where the socio-economic background of students was measured by an

ESCS index<sup>2</sup>. What do the 2006 PISA study results say? In each OECD country on average 33 percent of this difference (variability) could be contributed to the difference between schools. But in Slovakia the between school variability contribution was much higher – almost 41 percent. Furthermore, there was a significant influence of students' socio-economic background on their test achievement (statistically significantly higher compared to the average of the OECD) (PISA 2006, In Identification Sheet of the Survey No 016).

As for the last indicator introduced in this section, the literacy level in relation to gender based differences there is the 2001 PIRLS study as a source of data. From the key PIRLS relevant data it should be highlighted that it is girls who achieve significantly better results than boys, which is a finding common for almost all compared countries. On the whole scale there is an eleven-point average results difference between Slovakian girls and boys in the reading test, consequently Slovakia belongs to countries with a relatively low but statistically significant difference between girls and boys. Girls also have achieved better marks. More girls than boys score highly in the mother tongue and literature. Despite this finding, there have not been confirmed any statistically significant differences between the average results of girls and boys who have the same mark (PIRLS 2006). These gender based findings appear to show that the school testing is more suitable for girls who achieve better results, which consequently might influence the post secondary education attainment or at least might make the entrance more demanding for boys.

## 7. Conclusion

The EPASI country report on Slovakia views Slovakia from the perspective of inequalities and educational activities focused on persons with inequalities/disadvantages. The report tries to reflect the issues of integration, opportunities for persons with various disadvantages that are provided at the level of the structure of the educational system as well as reserves in the field. The conclusion highlights some of the findings at the levels of key documents, national and European policy, NGOs' activities etc. The conclusion also tries to discuss the equal opportunities for all diverse groups of people with inequalities as an indicator of a long-term process of democracy and diversity implementation into the general social awareness, culture, policy, politics and legislation which started in Slovakia after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. The conclusion focuses on linguistic, ethnic, disability, gender inequalities.

Linguistic and ethnic minorities seem to be practically addressed at the levels of NGO activities, political (rather than legislative) discourse and they are also targeted at the level of educational practice, by intercultural education. Despite quite numerous shortcomings regarding (i) imperfect or contradictory legislation as well as (ii) other issues raised during the implementation process that have been drawn in a Kalligram Foundation's<sup>3</sup> alternative report on *The European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages* implementation in Slovakia, it is necessary to view the situation in a holistic way and with awareness of the fact that the charter implementation is also a process of diversity – democracy implementation which started only in the year 1989. Keeping this in mind is necessary so that the report is viewed as a continuous report on improvements made in Slovakia since the Velvet Revolution as well as a basis for even further improvements to be made in this area.

In the field of linguistic and ethnic minority education in Slovakia there was signed *The European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages* on behalf of Slovak Republic in Strasbourg on

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<sup>2</sup> The index was constructed on the bases of parents working positions, highest educational level achieved by mother and/or father and household possessions). (PISA 2006, In Identification Sheet of the Survey No 016).

<sup>3</sup> Kalligram Foundation is a Center for Legal Analyses (CLA).

February 20, 2001 (ratified by the President of Slovak republic on July 20, 2001, coming into force in the Slovak Republic on January 1, 2002 based on the Article 19, Section 2). On the grounds of the EPASI analysis it is possible to combine the EPASI findings with some of the Kalligram Foundation's report findings from the area of national minority languages during official proceedings, area of education, legislative definition of minorities and minority media (CLA 2003).

The usage of languages of national minorities during official proceedings in Slovakia comprises at least of two levels: legislation and implementation by municipalities. The rights can be exercised only in municipalities where more than 20 percent of the population formed a national minority. Another problem is that the use of minority language is not completely granted even in municipalities where the 20 percent threshold is met, because municipal authorities are not covered by the law on the use of minority languages. This state of affairs can be evaluated not only in political terms (clearly, the decision to allow the use of minority languages only in municipalities, where the population reaches the 20 percent threshold, without having regard to the fact that there are regional centres with almost no minority population, while the region itself has a significant minority population, is a political decision). Another important shortcoming of the current law is the fact that minority languages cannot be used during the so-called specialised state administration proceedings (such as tax or customs proceedings), which create considerable limits for representatives of national minorities in effective usage of their language in official proceedings. The effective usage of national minority languages during official proceedings is limited also by weak awareness of state officials on this issues and also the fact that official pre-printed forms very often used in official proceedings are not available in the language of the relevant national minority. Last but not least, the commitment of the Slovak Republic to publish the most important legal documents in the language of a national minority is not performed by the state itself, but is mostly supported by private financial sources (CLA 2003).

As for the elementary and secondary education of pupils with a combination of linguistic, ethnic and socio-economic inequalities in Slovakia there are projects and efforts to extend the organisation of pre-school preparatory (zero) classes and programmes to prepare Roma people for positions of teacher's assistants. Multiplication of these programmes is needed. What Slovakia needs to develop further is a systemic long-term strategy to improve the accessibility of education for Roma which represents one of the key factors in the improvement of the Roma minority situation. There are also some activities addressing Roma people eg at the level of tertiary education. The analysis of projects also reveals a double discrimination (that is combination of inequalities) related to the Roma people and gender issues, ie Roma women, as is shown in the project [\*Summer School of Gender Studies for Roma University Female Students\*](#). This project is also a source of evidence of a close cooperation between the Slovak and Czech Republic since the project was realised by the Czech-Slovak Women's Fund.

Within the state universities, there exists special education for teachers in minority languages (fully or partially) for the needs of Hungarian elementary and secondary schools (for example at Konštantín Philosopher University in Nitra, partially also at its branch office in Dunajská Streda, and at the Department of Hungarian Language and Literature of Comenius University in Bratislava, Section of Hungarian Language at the Department of Ugrofin and Baltic Languages at Philosophical Faculty of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica in particularly). The Ukrainian minority has its base of education for teachers at Prešov University, where the Department of Ukrainian Language and Literature operates. This department provides three kinds of studies for its students – Bc. in Ukrainian language; Mgr. in Slavonic philology of Ukrainian language and literature, respectively pedagogy together with Ukrainian language and literature in combination with another subject (the Czech and Polish did not articulate such demands). Carpathian Germans started to show interest for establishing study for preparation of teachers for the first four grades of elementary schools and there is some cooperation with UKF in Nitra. However, representatives of

national minorities are studying at other universities, faculties and departments of Slovak higher education. The basis for university studies for the education of Roma intelligence is provided by Konštantín Philosopher University (UKF) in Nitra where the Department of Roma Culture was established in 1990 (from November 15 2001 being a part of the newly established Faculty of Social Affairs at the university). Admission examinations to all departments at Slovak universities in minority language are not regulated by current legislation regarding higher education (CLA 2003).

According to the EPASI findings, comparison of the numbers of Roma people with the highest attained education between 1991 and 2001 and based on the CLA's report there is evident increase in the numbers of Roma people with higher education (CLA 2003). Consequently the approach of Roma people to education is facilitated. However there still is a problem of the Roma children from segregated Roma settlements, which unfortunately still contributes to making their education more difficult. Another form of isolation is the constant existence of so-called segregation classes attended by Roma children at ordinary elementary schools. Most of the projects introducing the institute of so-called Roma assistants aimed at helping the progress of Roma pupils in schools are in a pilot phase and are implemented by NGOs mostly. The state step by step starts to participate in this field of activities, the approach is becoming more and more systemic, the progress is slow but evident. In 1998, the Programme Declaration of the Slovak Government established the currently existing network of institutions focused on the national minorities issues. Such a network of institutions never had any legal framework in the sense of having been regulated in legislation and was therefore always dependent on the political will to maintain the system. The Section for Minority Cultures of the Ministry of Culture was – similarly to the Department of Minority Education, established on the basis of a Programme Declaration of the Government and this has no legal, only a political ground. Other limitations are that neither the Section, nor the Department has any rights to accept independent decisions, nor do they have an independent budget. Representatives of civil society try to pursue the need for a long-term strategy for the support of minority media broadcasting (CLA 2003).

Another inequality quite widely targeted by educational activities in Slovakia, mostly by private or non-profit organizations, is gender. Gender issues are a subject of the discourse in the field of intercultural education. This statement is supported by the projects analysis findings, ie projects [Gender Sensitive Education](#) and [Gender Sensitive Education of Boys](#). There is also an increase in the number of books and sources on this topic. Gender issues are targeted not only by Slovakia itself but also by the Czech-Slovak Women's fund addressing combined gender-Roma inequality (see the project [Summer School of Gender Studies for University Roma Female Students](#)).

During the criterion-based analysis there appeared several difficulties, the main ones seem to lie mainly in the following areas:

- There is not enough attention paid to the systemic evaluation of past/undergoing projects.
- Materials concerning the activities and projects are neither surveyed, coordinated nor monitored systemically enough.
- There is a need to develop legislation in related areas, the legislation level should pay attention to experience and recommendations of the project organisers, NGOs etc. more intensely.
- There is low coordination between the project organisers' level itself too.

These points are implied mainly from the projects analysis and case studies. However, they are supported by similar findings of research reports focusing on specific targeted areas too.



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## Appendix: Project Summaries

Theme	Project	Database code	Subsidiary themes
Minority ethnic groups	<a href="#">Artistic Competition Accompanying the Campaign All Different - All equal</a>	185	S R L D G
	<a href="#">Roma people studies [Case Study 1]</a>	187	S L
	<a href="#">Project EQUAL Improved Approach to Education – Remedy for Labour Market Discrimination</a>	188	S L
	<a href="#">Roma Children Adopt Africa</a>	189	S
	<a href="#">Improvement of language teaching and learning at schools with a minor instructional language and foundation of Educational, Informational, Documentation, Counselling and Consultancy Centre for Roma People</a>	190	S L
	<a href="#">Voice of Roma Youth On Line</a>	195	S L
	<a href="#">Reintegration of socially disadvantaged children from special schools into standard primary schools</a>	201	S L
	<a href="#">New Minorities and Us</a>	184	L
Socio-economic	<a href="#">Christmas Together</a>	191	E L
	<a href="#">AMOR (Art therapy = painting + personality development) [Case Study 2]</a>	193	E L
Disabilities	<a href="#">Work in a Pupil Fund Programme: Routes to Independence [Case Study 3]</a>	192	
	<a href="#">Drama education for hearing impaired persons in a Children’s Theater Ensemble EFFÍK</a>	194	
	<a href="#">Rehabilitation and Integration Stay for Children and Youth</a>	196	
	<a href="#">Programme of Disabled Pupils’ Preparation Oriented on Skills for Labour Market</a>	199	
	<a href="#">New Diagnostic Programme HAMET2 – Opportunity for Disabled Pupils</a>	200	
Gender	<a href="#">Introduction and Development of Community Based Rehabilitation in the Slovakia and in Latvia</a>	203	
	<a href="#">Gender Sensibilisation in Educational Process at Basic and Secondary Schools as a Preparation of Future Professional Desegregation</a>	186	
	<a href="#">Model of Gender Sensitive Education of Boys [Case Study 4]</a>	197	
	<a href="#">Model of Gender Sensitive Education [Case Study 4]</a>	198	
	<a href="#">Summer School of Gender Studies for Roma University Female Students</a>	202	E L

Key: **E** ethnic minorities; **S** Socio-economic disadvantage; **R** religious minorities; **L** linguistic minorities; **D** disability; **I** indigenous minorities; **G** gender

## Appendix: Project Overview

Project	target age range					target theme(s)						
	pre-school	primary	secondary	higher	working life	minority ethnic	socio-economic	religious minority	linguistic minorities	disability	indigenous minorities	gender
<a href="#">Artistic Competition Accompanying the Campaign All Different - All equal</a>		✓	✓	✓		✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
<a href="#">Roma people studies [Case Study 1]</a>			✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓		✓			
<a href="#">Project EQUAL Improved Approach to Education – Remedy for Labour Market Discrimination</a>				✓	✓	✓✓	✓		✓			
<a href="#">Roma Children Adopt Africa</a>		✓	✓			✓✓	✓					
<a href="#">Improvement of language teaching and learning at schools with a minor instructional language and foundation of Educational, Informational, Documentation, Counselling and Consultancy Centre for Roma People</a>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓		✓			
<a href="#">Voice of Roma Youth On Line</a>			✓	✓		✓✓	✓		✓			
<a href="#">Reintegration of socially disadvantaged children from special schools into standard primary schools</a>	✓	✓				✓✓	✓		✓			
<a href="#">New Minorities and Us</a>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓			✓			
<a href="#">Christmas Together</a>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓✓		✓			
<a href="#">AMOR (Art therapy = painting + personality development) [Case Study 2]</a>		✓	✓			✓	✓✓		✓			
<a href="#">Work in a Pupil Fund Programme: Routes to Independence [Case Study 3]</a>			✓							✓✓		
<a href="#">Drama education for hearing impaired persons in a Children's</a>	✓	✓	✓							✓✓		

<a href="#">Theatre Ensemble EFFIK</a>								
<a href="#">Rehabilitation and Integration Stay for Children and Youth</a>	✓	✓						✓✓
<a href="#">Programme of Disabled Pupils' Preparation Oriented on Skills for Labour Market</a>			✓	✓				✓✓
<a href="#">New Diagnostic Programme HAMET2 – Opportunity for Disabled Pupils</a>			✓					✓✓
<a href="#">Introduction and Development of Community Based Rehabilitation in the Slovakia and in Latvia</a>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓✓
<a href="#">Gender Sensibilisation in Educational Process at Basic and Secondary Schools as a Preparation of Future Professional Desegregation</a>		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓✓
<a href="#">Model of Gender Sensitive Education of Boys</a>			✓					✓✓
[Case Study 4]								
<a href="#">Model of Gender Sensitive Education</a>			✓	✓	✓			✓✓
[Case Study 4]								
<a href="#">Summer School of Gender Studies for Roma University Female Students</a>			✓			✓	✓	✓✓

✓✓Indicates main theme addressed,  
 ✓Indicates additional themes also addressed