

Slovakia discrimination against Roma - Joint Statement

15 November 2007

EU action is needed to end Slovakia's discrimination against Roma children

Amnesty International and the Open Society Institute call for EU action on Slovakia to end the systematic violation of the right of Roma children to education.

The segregation of Roma children in Slovakia is a particularly serious manifestation of the overall problem of Roma discrimination in the EU, with widespread repercussions for these children and their community. In separate reports, Amnesty International and the Open Society Institute concluded that Slovak Roma children are placed disproportionately in schools for children with mental disabilities or segregated into Roma-only schools. In some parts of Eastern Slovakia 100% of schools are segregated.

Roma children in Slovakia also receive worse quality education than other Slovak children. Majority-Roma schools are overcrowded and more unqualified teachers work there. As a result the levels of literacy within the Roma population in Slovakia are persistently low.

With an inferior curriculum in the first years of schooling, Roma children in Slovakia have a remote possibility of entering mainstream schools or pursuing higher education. Discrimination at this early age therefore undermines the potential of entire generations and also contributes to the further marginalisation of the Roma community as a whole. Research has shown that the Roma living in Eastern Slovakia, in particular, are among the most deprived communities in Europe, facing discrimination in accessing services and exercising a number of basic rights including the rights to health and work, and to freedom of expression and political participation – all key avenues to breaking a vicious cycle of poverty and marginalization. As Katarina Tomaševski, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, noted: *"The right to education is the pass key to unlocking other human rights."*

Amnesty International and the Open Society Institute consider that the Slovak government, despite some efforts to improve the situation, so far has failed to recognise and genuinely commit to ending the blatant discrimination of Roma children. The special measures that have been introduced to address the problem are not compulsory or monitored and in many cases they are not implemented.

Furthermore, domestic law still allow a very wide scope for discrimination, with non-objective criteria used to justify the segregation of children. For example, current provisions allow for a child with basic communication problems to be placed in a school for children with disabilities. In some cases the ratio of Roma children in these so-called "special" schools, amounts to 80%.

The two leading human rights NGOs call on the European Union to press the Slovak government to abide by the guiding human rights principles and values of the Union through:

- providing the necessary financial and technical assistance to support and monitor all efforts by the Slovak government to end the discrimination of Roma children and ensure that they can access equal and quality education.

They also urge the EU to put further pressure on the Slovak government to:

- reverse systematic segregation in access to education;
- publicly commit to desegregation;
- amend domestic legislation, specifically the School Act, to ensure that special measures to advance the education of Roma children are made compulsory and new measures are introduced to explicitly tackle segregated education;
- ensure full participation of the Roma community in setting and implementing policies and programmes.

Finally, Amnesty International and the Open Society Institute ask the EU to adopt an integrated policy on Roma, so as to make real use of all legal and financial instruments supposed to target discrimination in EU countries.

Note to editors

Amnesty International's report *Still separate, still unequal: Violations of the right to education for Romani children in Slovakia*, is presented today simultaneously at press conferences in Bratislava and in Brussels. It can be downloaded at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur010122007>

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The Open Society Institute's report 'Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma in Slovakia', released today, is part of a monitoring reports series covering the nine countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015. The report is also available online at www.eumap.org.

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