

Faces of Poverty in Slovakia

Poverty and Social Exclusion

The mission of human development is to widen the opportunities available to each individual. A variety of reasons typically restrict such opportunities. One reason is the *poverty* that deprives or even excludes people from the current lifestyle of a given society, and even causes regression of human life.

Poverty is a worldwide problem that afflicts even the wealthiest countries in the world. The public in Slovakia gradually became aware of the poverty after November 1989. Due to ideological reasons, the phenomenon of poverty was absent from the official dictionary of socialist Czechoslovakia, which included Slovakia. The communist principle of equality was incompatible with a social inequality such as poverty. Despite this philosophical conflict, the population's standard of life declined because of the country's economic hardships that resulted from a communist regime. Some groups were affected to an extent that prompted the conducting of a survey entitled *Groups of Population with Restricted Opportunities of Consumption*, a euphemism for the poor population. In looking further at the past, we can state that poverty was a standard component of Slovak life under the 19th and early 20th century Hungarian Empire, and that its existence was caused mainly by retarded industrialization.

Slovakia's current society is transforming itself into a modern society. This means that it is becoming a society understood to have social stratification, which includes "poverty is a physical and measurable lower pole of the ideal stratification bipolarity – poverty and wealth". In a socially structured society, poverty is both a reflection and a result of social redistribution of wealth that depends on individual success in a market environment, and on the magnitude of social redistribution performed by State (Tomeš, 1996).

Poverty may be viewed as a legitimate component of a modern society. In viewing the Slovak society, it should be stressed that the term "poverty" has not been acknowledged in legislation and that official statistics do not record numbers of the poor, as is the case in the European Union by Eurostat. Yet, poverty has been the object of several surveys that have been conducted paradoxically under different names by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic or the Research Institute of the Slovak Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Family. Slovakia has typically used synonyms for poverty, such as "socially underprivileged population", "low-income households", and "material distress". The latter term has been used in legislation, and in fact refers to poverty.¹

In Europe, poverty has been investigated since the late 19th century. Its perception has been evolving. Originally, anybody who lived in apparently bad conditions and faced problems with his/her physical survival was considered poor. A broader definition of poverty currently prevails in European countries, consistent with that of the Council of Europe (CE) of December 1984, which is "poverty refers to persons, families or groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural, and social) are limited to the extent that they exclude them from the minimally accepted lifestyle of the countries where they live".

The major characteristic of this "European" definition of poverty is the stress laid on the consequences of poverty, being *social exclusion* of the poor. Exclusion from the minimally acceptable way of life in the given country means that a) a general disfavoring is evident with respect to education, employment, housing or financial resources; b) the opportunities to access

¹ In the context of Slovakia's integration efforts, it might be appropriate to accept the term *poverty*, including its statistical recording in the same form as it is being done in the EU (by Eurostat).

major social institutions that distribute various social opportunities are substantially smaller than for the remaining population; and c) both a) and b) are a relatively permanent condition (Konopásek, 1991).

For Slovakia, the term *material distress* is used as a synonym for poverty. It also has been defined in legislation as a condition characterized by an individual's income that is below the level of life subsistence specified by separate regulation. In a certain sense, *social distress* may also be considered a term close to that of poverty. Social distress is also defined in Slovak legislation as "a condition associated with the inability of the individual to take care of himself/herself, his/her household, of the protection and exercising of his/her rights and legally protected interests or of the contact with the social environment, in particular because of age, unfavorable health condition, inability to socially adapt himself/herself or the loss of job." Material distress is understood as a consequence of insufficient income, whereas social distress expresses social exclusion due to various reasons as well as its impacts, that may or may not necessarily being connected with poverty. The CE definition of poverty links these two forms of distress. Thus, it would be appropriate to accept this definition in the Slovak language also because Slovakia is a member state of CE.

Unlike material distress, whose definition is too narrow and does not cover the entire serious and extensive problem of poverty, the CE definition of poverty is a broader concept that includes both the background of poverty and its consequences, including social exclusion. It should be noted that, although used together, poverty and social exclusion are not identical. Social exclusion is broader in scope than just poverty. It includes the risk of marginalization and exclusion of individuals and groups in several areas of life, and always includes poverty. Poverty does not necessarily mean social exclusion. Poverty relates to a consumption standard of low or inadequate material means. Some groups who are not considered as poor can suffer systemic exclusion, e.g. racial or ethnic minorities, the handicapped, women, etc. Social exclusion is also associated with inclusion. For example, individuals excluded from one area can at the same time be included into another area (e.g., mothers are excluded from the labor market, but they are included into the family or other areas of the society).

The determination of the poverty line is of principal importance for the definition of poverty. Traditionally, the poverty line is based on income or expenditures, which are not the same. In western countries, including the US and also in Hungary, the poverty line is based on average income of the given country. The poverty line usually represents 50 percent of the arithmetic mean of the net income in the given country. In some countries, the basis may be only 40 percent. Households with incomes lower than the set poverty line are defined as being poor. Although low income itself does not reflect cultural and social aspects, it generally does express poverty.

There is no explicit definition of the poverty line in Slovakia. However, we believe that *life subsistence* can be considered equivalent to this definition because it represents a key point of social policy used to derive various social measures of State. The former Czechoslovakia's Federal Act No. 463/1991 had already defined life subsistence. It was expressed as the "socially recognized minimum limit of income of individuals below which material distress occurs." Citizens of Czechoslovakia were, for the first time, granted that their social situation is subject to the interest of the State's social policy. Adoption of the Life Subsistence Act was preceded by the adoption of the Constitutional Act No. 23/1991 Coll. that introduced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its Article 30 laid down the right of citizens to obtain assistance for the situation of material distress, thereby providing a provision for basic conditions of life. After the split of Czechoslovakia, this right has been guaranteed by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. Human rights have become the basis in the approach for helping the poor, not

only in the sense of their right for assistance, but also from the aspects of their right for human dignity.

The concept of a subsistence minimum had already been considered during the communist regime. During the late 1960s, life subsistence started to be calculated for retired pensioners. Standards for life subsistence were also set within surveys conducted since 1970 for "groups of the population with restricted opportunities of consumption." In other words, the determination of life subsistence requirements was based on a minimum basket of goods and services calculated in current prices. The minimum was set using a relative method based on average income. Two levels of minimum subsistence were recognized: *existence and social minimum*. Both terms are also being used in current Slovak legislation.

An existence minimum expresses the minimum expenditures for basic existential needs of an individual, including food, necessary clothing and shelter. The relative method sets its computation at 42 percent of average income. The existence minimum is always less than the social minimum, and expresses the poverty line that also is referred to as absolute or extreme poverty. Traditional thinking prefers that we speak of distress or misery instead of poverty. The social minimum expresses a socially minimal level standard of life and requires the fulfilling of current existential needs in the given society, at a corresponding level of economic and social development and at a minimally socially acceptable level. Households that do not reach such a standard of life live in substandard conditions that are associated with suffering and deprivation. They are referred to as poor. Poverty determined based on a social minimum is also referred to as relative poverty.

The Subsistence Minimum Act, adopted in 1991, was in force until 1998. During this period, the subsistence minimum was valorized in 1993, 1995 and 1997. A new Act on subsistence minimum was adopted in Slovakia in 1998. It is based on civil principles and stresses citizen responsibility for his/her unfavorable life situation. Current practice in Slovakia represents a socially recognized minimum of net income that is expected to satisfy household needs at a very modest level (a household being an individual or a family). It includes expenditures on basic needs, such as food, basic personal needs, replacement of the basic household needs, and a minimum of social contacts. A subsistence minimum conceived in this way assumes that life is possible at this level only temporarily, and that there is a real opportunity to improve one's material standing through one's own efforts.

The Subsistence Minimum Act, and the subsequently adopted Social Assistance Act, specifies the application of three formerly defined levels of a subsistence minimum, and thereby also the differentiation of social benefits. The differentiation criterion is based on whether or not the individual caused his/her unfavorable situation himself/herself because of subjective reasons. The monthly subsistence minimum amounts were modified on July 1, 2000 to be SKK 3,490 for one major natural person, and SKK 2,440 for any additional adult natural person assessed together or any maintained minor child, and SKK 1,580 for any dependent child. Individuals that are in material distress due to objective reasons and have no income from earning will receive social assistance benefits to supplement their income in the given month to reach the subsistence minimum, as set forth by a separate regulation.

A *social minimum* provides another level of subsistence minimum. Benefits are paid to individuals in material distress due to objective reasons even though they have income from earnings. They supplement the income in the given calendar month to reach 120 percent of subsistence minimum set forth by a separate regulation. An *existence minimum* represents the lowest level of the subsistence minimum; benefits are granted to individuals in material distress due to subjective reasons. The benefits supplement the income in the given month to reach 50 percent of the subsistence minimum set forth by a separate regulation. The purpose of the

existence minimum is to secure the basic conditions of life, including one warm meal daily, necessary clothing, and shelter.

The Subsistence Minimum Act and the Social Assistance Act apply not only to Slovak nationals within the extent of basic conditions of life, but also to foreign nationals, persons without statehood, refugees, displaced persons, and foreign Slovaks.

The subsistence minimum was set using the relative method based on income of individuals. Income characteristics were determined for households with the lowest 10 percent of income, based on Statistical Office data and subsistence minimum standards for individual components of food, other basic personal needs, and housing expenditures.

State resources to pay for the social benefits are scarce. The introduction of a subsistence minimum concept will require further reductions. Yet, the subsistence minimum of SKK 1,745 monthly pushes a portion of the population to the "misery" line.² Based on the methods used in Slovakia as well as those used abroad, the numbers of poor people in the EU during 1993 ranged between 6 percent in Denmark and 26 percent in Portugal (*Income distribution...*, 1997).

Based on procedures used in the communist Czechoslovakia, 21 percent of the population in Slovakia was classified as poor during the late 50s. During the subsequent 30 years, the number classified as poor dropped markedly. The poor made up 9 to 11 percent of Czechoslovakia's total population during 1958-1976 (Hiršl, 1992). Using the same survey method, there were 9.56 percent of all households living below the social minimum level in 1998, which represented 9.02 percent of individuals. 1.13 percent of all households lived below the subsistence minimum limit, which represented 1.25 percent individuals (*Report on the Social...*, 1999).

The number of Slovakia's poor people and/or those in material distress after 1989 can be derived from statistical data for recipients of social benefits. On this basis, there were 584,941 individuals that were considered in material distress (or below the poverty line) in December 1999. That *represented 10.8 percent of the overall population*. It is evident, from the table below, that this has been the largest proportion since 1993.

Table 31

Population in Material Distress in Slovakia (as at Dec 31 of the respective year)

Indicator	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Number of individuals in material distress	386,323	442,544	408,507	378,637	392,927	506,440	584,941
Share in total population (%)	7.2	8.3	7.6	7.0	7.3	9.4	10.8

Note: Figures include dependent persons on recipients of social assistance benefits (until 1998, social care benefits).
Source: Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family of the Slovak Republic, 2000.

From a regional perspective, the largest number of social assistance benefit recipients in December 1999 was from the Region of Košice. That included 16.67 percent of the region's total population and 21 percent of the total numbers of recipients of social assistance benefits in Slovakia. The Region of Prešov had corresponding numbers of 16 percent and 19 percent respectively. The Region of Banská Bystrica's respective numbers were 12 percent and 16 percent, and the Region of Bratislava recorded the lowest numbers of 2.1 percent and 3 percent

² A possibly more efficient way to reduce expenditures on social assistance might be through a consistent control of "black labor". The numbers of individuals working "black" and receiving social benefits in Slovakia and even abroad has been estimated at more than 100,000.

(*Report on Social...*, 1999). It is clear from these numbers that the risk of poverty increased when moving in the direction from west to east. In the past, the poor regions (due to retarded industrialization) included the regions of Kysuce, Orava, Northern Zips, Zemplín, the southern part of Gemer, Hont and Novohrad.

There are no unambiguous methods to approach poverty. Undoubtedly, an interesting concept has been presented by the most representative survey of poverty in Slovakia. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, in collaboration with the French INSEE in 1995, conducted the survey under the heading of "Social Situation of Households in Slovakia" and under the *Poverty Project* framework. There were three bases for the determination of poverty, and thus also three forms of poverty recognized in the project:

- Monetary poverty – financial poverty, a term also used in foreign surveys. Its limit is usually given by 50 percent of the average income for the given country. In the survey mentioned, the limit was set at 60 percent because of the low-income differentiation of the Slovak population. Under this definition, 12.1 percent of Slovakia households were living in monetary poverty.
- Household conditions of life – the second approach, as defined by parameters for housing conditions, eating, functional articles owned by households (TV set, washer, refrigerator, etc.). Based on the conditions of life approach, 13.4 percent of the households were poor.
- Viewpoint of the poor themselves – the third approach, was the subjective viewpoint of the poor who were represented in low-income households. Under this approach, 7.7 percent households in Slovakia identified themselves as being poor (*Social Situation...*, 1995).

A significant factor in Slovakia's survey was the subjective opinions of low-income households concerning their situation. This approach to the poor, i.e., those having experience with poverty, is given strong attention in other countries. As pointed out by several authors, poverty is on one hand determined from the outside, by statistical methods and expertise. On the other hand, people themselves are allowed to their own poverty status by stating whether their income covers their basic needs and whether they feel poor or not.

National, supranational, and international organizations have become established in Europe to associate and represent poor people (e.g. the organization Fourth World). They wish to directly speak and propose government actions to ease the situation and position of the poor. They state that only those who know the situation of the poverty, from their own experience, can draft suggestions for solutions. They provide a voice in favor of the poor, identify and propose resolutions of problems, provide the necessary ethical principles, and support the human dignity of the poor. They recognize that poverty is more than indices and percentages, that it is also communication with those who have experienced poverty.

Groups at Risk of Poverty

Not all groups of the population are at equal risk of poverty. From historical aspects, we may see that there has been certain stability in this respect, as well as some shifts. The first type of poverty in the 19th century was the "working class" stricken by pauperization. During 1945 through 1970 social minorities were at risk. Since 1970, it has been the group of unemployed that has had the greatest risk of poverty. This evolution has made poverty "novel", a term that means coping with economic and political problems and the subsequent emerging "underclass" in big cities. Although the data is based on the US experience, analogies can also be found in Slovakia. The unemployed (mainly long-term unemployed) represented 71-91 percent of the total numbers of social assistance benefit recipients during 1993-1999 in Slovakia. The highest percentage has been recorded toward the end of the 1990s. Eurostat data also suggest that the households of the unemployed in the EU are most likely poorer than other households. When it comes to the "underclass" emerging due to unemployment and subsequent poverty, it is the

"ghettos" of metropolitan towns that can be viewed as evidence of this fact. In United Kingdom, there is no clear-cut definition for the underclass, although the development is heading in this direction. The underclass will not only comprise members of ethnic minorities, but also white people from poor areas (Giddens, 1999). Manifestations of the underclass in Slovakia are not visible in big cities (although they have been suggested with respect to some quarters). As an analogy, settlements of Roma people located outside of the current population centers of Slovakia can be clearly considered poor and branded by high unemployment rates. A potential rise of social pathology will be connected with poverty, including crime, prostitution, and drug addictions that all become a standard way of life for the underclass.

An association between the *long-term unemployed* and the group of people at the highest risk of poverty is given by the very definition of a modern society that is perceived as a working society. This means that the condition of the labor market (or even exclusion from its framework) is the most significant poverty risk indicator. A resolution to the problem of poverty is connected with changes required to solve the employment problem. In the past, the solution to the unemployment problem was connected with the development of industrialization. In the 1950s, society was evolving from an industrial society toward a post-industrial and/or information society. In such a society, also referred to as "third-wave" society, the pattern of unemployment undergoes changes. Unemployment was quantitative in an industrial society where the unemployed were a result of redundancy. In a "third wave" society, unemployment is of qualitative nature where adequacy of education is the key criteria for success in the information society's labor market. Slovakia is thus in a situation where a resolution to the unemployment problem (and thus potential poverty) is no longer possible through further industrialization. What is needed is the creation of a "third-wave" economy to prevent the society from heading towards a 21st century Bangladesh (Toffler, 1996).

Two groups at the highest risk of poverty were recently identified in the EU. They include elderly people (which is a traditional group in this respect) and *people with lower levels of education*. People with low level of education in Slovakia are also in a similar position, although the trend is less pronounced. Even if the level of education does not improve income, as is the case in France, and even if intellectual work does not prevent monetary poverty, people with a low level or no education will become a group at the highest risk of poverty. It cannot be ignored that education is a precondition for success in the labor market.

As already mentioned, the position in the labor market or exclusion from its framework is the most significant indicator of poverty. Traditionally, this concerns the *elderly* who are excluded from the labor market due to age. In developed countries, this is being dealt with by continuous valorization of pensions. In this way, State protects from poverty this portion of the population "at risk". The same is true in Slovakia, even though the efficiency is questionable in the view of the diminishing real value of pensions. The amount of a monthly old-age pension has only a minimal difference to the poverty line subsistence minimum. Pensioners who still work can achieve a higher standard of life. As of December 31, 1999, only 8.7 percent of pensioners still worked. We should point out that the retirement age in Slovakia is much lower than in the EU: 60 years for males, 57 years for females (or even less depending on the number of children, one year for every child up to 5 children. The youngest age a woman can in theory retire is therefore at 53 years. This communist-based generosity can no longer be adequately funded, not even with the valorization of pensions. The retirement age will therefore have to be revised, even despite public opinion that is not positively inclined to this idea. Only 9.7 percent of Slovakia's population would be in favor of increasing the retirement age.

Without any doubt, the groups at risk of poverty include *incomplete families with children*. Poverty is a significant threat to incomplete families (divorced families or unmarried parents). The number of single parents in EU Member States has been growing, to be one of the most

pronounced demographic and social trends in recent years. There were almost 7 million single parents in the EU during 1996, Denmark and Sweden not included (*Lone-parent families...*, 1998).

Incomplete families made up 10.4 percent of all households in Slovakia during 1991, primarily due to divorces.³ The growth of divorce rates may be expected to cause single-parent families to reach 15.5 percent of family households. There is no pronounced tendency for an increase in Slovakia's population of unmarried parents. Children are born mostly to married couples because the cultural environment is not inclined to support extramarital births.

Children are very likely to be at risk of poverty, as suggested by both domestic and foreign surveys. However, child poverty is not sufficiently visible because statistics primarily present poverty that affects families or households, leaving child poverty as an undocumented problem. Another reason that child poverty has little visibility is that State decisions focus on the needs of families and children, with family benefits minimizing the needs of children. Several authors have stated that there is no minimum standard of life specified for children. The proportion of children living in poverty is understood to keep growing. In 1993, there were more than 13 million children in the EU 12 that were younger than 16 years, one in five living in poverty (*Income Distribution...*, 1997). By the end of 1999, 16.7 percent of all Slovak families with dependent children were in material distress. From subjective aspect, families with three or more children and incomplete families with children tend to perceive themselves as being the poorest (the number of children is a traditional indicator of poverty).

In addition to recognized groups at risk, there are also poor groups of population that are not included in the statistics (poor beyond statistics) because they cannot be counted. They include **homeless people** that are poor in the very sense of a definition of poverty, both from the aspect of income and from social exclusion (including also offenders serving time in prisons, drug addicts, etc.).

In the more general sense, a homeless individual is one with no housing, socially excluded, and "included" in non-residential spaces of ruins, garbage bins, basements, canals, railway and bus stations, streets, parks, spaces under bridges, and airport areas. All these spaces can be considered as replacement housing for inclusion of the homeless (according to Giddens, 1999). Their lack of income is "dealt with" by collecting bottles, paper, food remainders taken from garbage bins, and frequent begging.

There is no official definition of the homeless in Slovakia. They are referred to as "socially inadapted persons". Under communism, homelessness was not allowed and was prosecuted under Penal Code sections on parasitism. Sentences of up to three years in prison could be imposed. Many "homeless" exploited the Penal Code during the winter season to get into the "safety of the prison" for escaping deliberate thefts and to protect oneself from possible death due to freezing or undercooling. The number of homeless people in Slovakia is currently estimated at about 2,000 persons. The most frequent causes of homelessness include divorce, family conflicts, completion of term in prison, etc. A homeless way of life is typically branded by social pathologies such as alcoholism and stealing. A typical trait of the homeless is that they do not like asylums that are provided primarily by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They accept them but during the winter season. But, it is a way of life that usually ends tragically.

Homelessness is also viewed in the broader perspective of an absence of housing. In this view, the "homeless" includes adult children and young families that do not want to live with their parents (the prevailing method of coping with Slovakia's alarming housing shortage and high

³ Half of this number (5.4%) were incomplete families with dependent children.

costs). The portion of delinquent population that does not pay their rent is also a group at risk of homelessness.

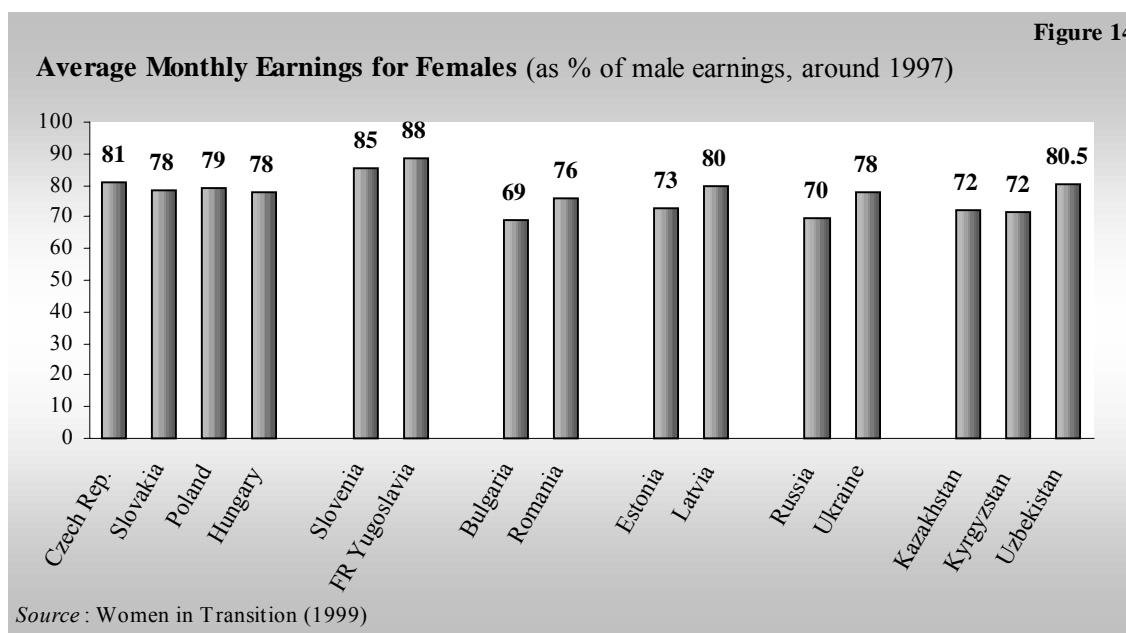
Statistics do not record their ethnic origin of individuals living in poverty because of respect for human rights. Yet, we cannot overlook that a significant portion of the *Roma ethnic* in Slovakia lives in poverty and misery. Their poverty is a result of their exclusion from the labor market that spawns long-term unemployment, from the size of their families, as well as from a low education level (see: *Poverty of the Roma*).

Feminization of Poverty

Another portion of the population that is markedly at risk of poverty is *women*. There are more women than men worldwide living in absolute poverty. This inequality keeps growing and has serious consequences for women and their children. Women have to face disproportionately more problems connected with the overcoming of poverty, social disintegration, and unemployment.

Poverty is increasingly feminized in Slovakia, as suggested by several surveys. The most important reason for this is the unequal or even discriminatory position of women in the labor market. "Economic power is at the basis of the equality of women that helps women to exercise their human rights. All international commitments contain the imperative of improving equality between men and women" (*Women in Transition*, 1999).

Even if discrimination against women is prohibited by legislation in Slovakia, it still exists in other forms and is common in real life. In the labor market, unequal positions are manifested as segregation based on occupations (where women prevail in low wage sectors, such as education, health care, State administration, etc.) and segregation within individual jobs (where groups of women are paid poorly compared to the higher pay of men). With certain variations, wage inequality and segregation is common in most countries of the world. In the European Union, earnings of women were 28 percent lower than those of men in 1995. The monthly income of women represented 72 percent of the income of men. Figure 14 illustrates the situation in transition countries.



Women's lower wages has the most important impact on the feminization of poverty. It becomes manifested by the fact that lonely elderly women and unmarried women are primarily

Box 10

Women and the Sex Industry

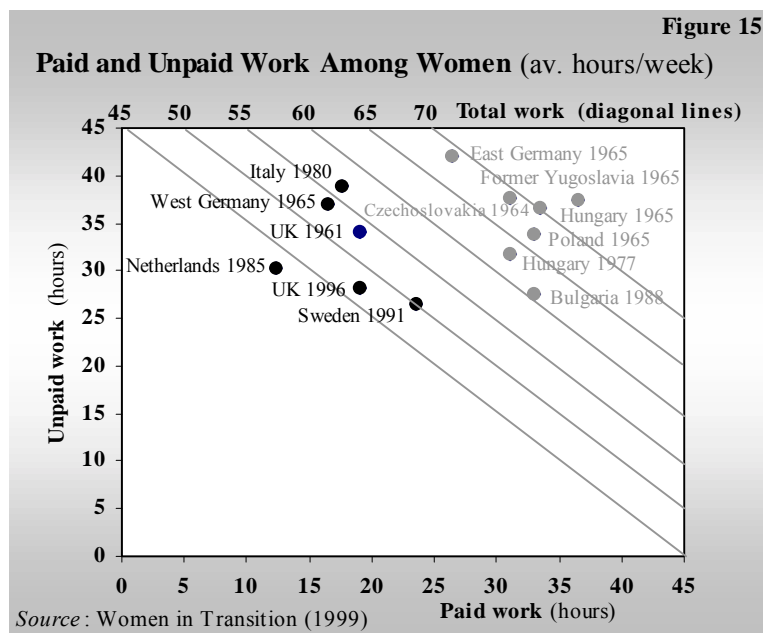
In the context of the feminization of poverty, the inequality of women with respect to income and unemployment, we may speculate about the potential socio-pathological consequences, among which the literally boom of the sex industry is at the foreground in transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It is uneasy to measure the degree of this boom, due to its irregularity and frequently criminal nature, but this phenomenon is openly observable. Numbers of women in countries in transition working as prostitutes have dramatically grown. Women from Eastern and Central Europe predominate as prostitutes in the streets of also many cities of Western Europe, many of them are forced to engage in such activities.

at the greatest risk of poverty. In considering monetary poverty, lonely women are the poorest, which could be interpreted as a consequence of women's income-related inequality.

Sexual harassment at workplaces also contributes toward income-related inequality of women. Unlike western countries where it may be legally prosecuted, sexual harassment in Slovakia is being de-tabooed, but to a minimal extent. Tolerance of sexual harassment frequently becomes a precondition for women to be promoted in their jobs, for better remuneration, and for acquiring or keeping a job. Supervisors may require sexual services at the workplace. As a rule,

women work in lower positions (vertical segregation of women), which provide the opportunity for their being sexually abused by their male supervisors. Sexual harassment is a form of social control over women. It prevents women from economic realization, social realization, and reduces their self-esteem and self-confidence. As a result, they may lose the interest in working. There may be a reduction in their working performance, or they may even leave their job. Sexual abuse at workplaces is a silent though strong factor operating in transition countries. In 1991, 10 percent of Czechoslovak women reported such a personal experience with their male supervisors. Sexual harassment at the workplace cannot be prosecuted under the law in Slovakia, and its severity is thus insufficiently visible.

We have examined the feminization of poverty from the view of the unequal position of women in the labor market and from the view of the lower remuneration of their work. Paid work is the key determinant of women's economic independence, a significant starting point for women to exercise their authority in the household, and for their participation in the broader society. There is also the overlooked and underestimated area of unpaid work that is also a reflection of women's inequality in society. Household work, though, is crucial for the economic survival of many families. Former communist countries were also typical in the high level employment of women (full-time jobs). Yet, women still had to work second shifts at home. The data suggests that the full workload of women in Eastern and Central Europe (both paid and unpaid work) averaged 70 hours weekly, which was 15 hours more than in women in Western Europe.



Feminization of poverty is tightly connected with the feminization of old-age and/or is its consequence. Feminization of old age occurs based on the "simple" reason that women live longer than men. Women therefore make up 65.5 percent of the population beyond retirement age. As far as the amount of the pensions is concerned, elderly women may receive more if they receive widow's pension. When the old-age pension is the only source of income, the average is but minimally different from the subsistence minimum. It should be noted that elderly women do not perceive their economic situation as a problem. Instead, they point to their loneliness, social exclusion (*Gender Statistics...*, 1999).

Feminization of old age also comes as a consequence of incomplete families that is a group with a marked risk of poverty. Incomplete families are mothers with children, either divorced or unmarried. Almost 89% of incomplete families are women who are mothers with one to many children. Feminization of poverty is therefore inseparably linked with the poverty of children.

There are several causes for the feminization of poverty. One of them is the *patriarchate*, as a historically created construct of behavior, which dictates the power relationship between man and woman. Even if this phenomenon does not represent a Slovak specific, it is present in all areas of life of the Slovak society, in both public and private spheres.

Patriarchate also exists in western cultures. It is being gradually and systematically eliminated, either due to the exercise of human rights or through feminism whose origin dates back to the 1960s. In this respect, Slovakia has a lot of catching up to do, even though daily life spawns numerous arguments about the sustainability of patriarchate. The most significant argument is that the two-income model of households is typical of Slovakia, high unemployment rates affect both men and women, and that households not infrequently are supported by the income of a woman. Nevertheless, surveys suggest that as much as 92 percent of both male and female respondents expect the "right man" can financially secure the family (Bútorová..., 1999). Based on such expectations, it is not easy to expect the elimination of patriarchate from the labor market and the subsequent elimination of feminization of poverty. There are several non-governmental organizations operating close to feminism in Slovakia. Yet, it mainly is international influence that literally forces Slovakia, in the framework of its efforts to join the EU, to adopt legislative standards that eliminate the inequality of women in society. In this respect, the most important document is the *National Action Plan for Women in the Slovak Republic* that was adopted by the Slovak Government in 1997. The document is based on the

Beijing Action Platform adopted at the 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. It comprehensively outlines changes needed to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. In this context, it is most important to eliminate the economic disadvantage of women.

An important force for eliminating patriarchy is the effort of men in western countries who are not satisfied with a power role of men toward both women and children. As an inspiration for Slovakia, there has been more than ten years of movement by "new fathers" to overcome the patriarchal role behavior of men in the education of children. That movement can form new patterns of parenthood. It does not mean switching roles with women. Rather, it attempts to change the roles. The legal definition of father's role has also changed in western countries.

Poverty of the Society

The term poverty is used to refer to a portion of society's population and to a society as a whole in its relationship to other societies. It is a common term for referring to third world countries.⁴ "We are witnessing a situation that there are ever more people in the countries worldwide that prosper whereas others live in indescribable poverty. Also, the difference between the wealthy and the poor in the wealthy as well as in developing countries grows bigger, and the difference between developed and many developing countries has grown even bigger." (UN World Summit, 1995). Other important international institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, pay attention to the issues of poverty as well.

In Slovakia, poor people and individuals in material distress make up approximately 10 percent of the population. However, a portion of the population whose income exceeds the subsistence minimum does not have a standard of life markedly above that of people recognized as poor. For example, the group at highest risk of poverty includes the long-term unemployed. Even so, employment does not guarantee entry to the world of those who are better off. Comparing Slovakia's current minimum wage standard of SKK 4,440 gross (i.e., real SKK 3,884 net) to the subsistence minimum of SKK 3,490 per month, we do not see a significant difference. This does not even consider the demotivating consequences of minimum wages on the reduction of unemployment.

Some jobs for unqualified labor in developed countries establish a new category of the poor, the *working poor*. The term "working poor" may be applied to several of Slovakia's occupations whose average income was SKK 5,249 in 1999. It is alarming that as many as 79 percent of Slovak households are afraid they may drop below the poverty line at some point in future (Fall, Horecký, Roháčová, 1999).

Table 32

Comparison of per Capita Net Incomes in the Lowest and Highest 10% Income Groups of Households (in SKK)^a

Indicator	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Net monthly income per capita in the lowest 10% households	2,014	2,308	2,830	2,768	2,893
Net monthly income per capita in the highest 10% households	7,162	10,964	12,459	13,448	12,934
Ratio of highest 10% to lowest 10%	3.56	4.75	4.40	4.86	4.47

Note: a. Lowest 10% = poorest 10%; highest 10% = richest 10%.

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

⁴ Rather than being limited to just poor, the term "fourth world" is also being used for areas of misery that have major problems, such as starvation, malnutrition, infectious diseases and, in the final effect, survival as such.

Despite the trend of moderately growing income disparities, Slovakia maintains its position among those with lowest levels of income inequality. According to international sources, the share of the poorest 20 percent of households on income and/or consumption is 11.9 percent, while being 31.4 percent for the richest 20 percent of households. Due to the relatively low share of rich households on total income, income inequality in Slovakia was the lowest worldwide in 1987-98.⁵

Constant economic development is the principal precondition to resolve the problem of poverty in a broader sense. The solution to poverty in a narrower sense, being State social policy, is dependent on the same precondition. By legislating a subsistence minimum as the "undrafted" poverty line, State social policy guarantees a citizen her/his legal claim for social assistance. The establishment of social nets is a precondition for preventing social exclusion of the poor.

A significant role is also played in Slovakia by dozens of NGOs that provide the poor with a variety of assistance. In addition to such transparent approaches for dealing with poverty, family transfers play a significant role in Slovakia. Prevention of poverty and the overcoming of poverty's consequences are concentrated in families. Family solidarity, coherence, and assistance are the most efficient mechanisms of protection against poverty. More than a half of all Slovak households accept assistance from relatives, parents, grandparents, children, and siblings.

Domestic Slovak household production (gardens, repairs, etc.) may be considered a specific Slovak approach to preventing and dealing with poverty. This, besides financial revenues, helps households to secure a better standard of life. Unpaid work can also be included since it is something without which many households could not survive. But, dealing with poverty cannot depend solely on "external" approaches. There must also be an "internal" approach that every single citizen has individual responsibility for the dealing with his or her individual situation, as accentuated by State social policy. In this respect, education emerges as a significant precondition for dealing with the problem of poverty and for achieving success in the labor market.

Conclusions

Poverty is one of the limiting conditions of human development. While there is no definition of poverty in the Slovak legislation, the term material distress can be considered as a synonym. European Union Member States use the definition of poverty developed by the Council of Europe. Slovakia should consider legislation that uses the same definition, in view of Slovakia's efforts to join the EU. The EU definition considers low income as an indicator of poverty and its association with potential social exclusion of the poor.

The poverty line in Slovakia is currently considered to be the subsistence minimum. Numbers of individuals living in poverty can be determined from statistical data on recipients of social benefits. Not all groups of the population are at an equal risk of poverty, which is mainly determined by their position in or exclusion from the labor market. The group at the greatest risk is the long-term unemployed who are the majority of social benefits recipients. Dealing with the issue of poverty thus is now an issue of dealing with unemployment. Previously, it was connected with the development of industrialization. It is now dependent on the development of an information society.

Another group at risk has traditionally been elderly people. This group is now dealt with through continuous valorization of pensions. An incomplete family, where the poverty of

⁵ UNDP: *Human Development Report 2000*. p. 172. Data for individual countries refer to the most recent year available during the period 1987-1998.

children is not sufficiently visible, is another group at risk of poverty. People with lower education levels are yet another group at significant risk of poverty.

Even if Slovak statistics do not record the ethnic affiliation of people living in poverty, it is evident that a significant portion of Slovakia's Roma ethnic population lives in poverty.

Analyses of poverty draw attention to the feminization of poverty, due to women's unequal position in the labor market and due to the lower remuneration for their work. Sexual harassment at the workplace makes a significant contribution to the income-related inequality of women. Tolerance of sexual harassment not infrequently is a precondition for the promotion of a woman's career and for their work remuneration. Another part of women's unequal position in the labor market is the overlooked, underestimated, and unpaid work of women in the household. It is also an expression of their unequal position in the society in general. In its final effect, patriarchy as a prevailing model of behavior of both men and women in Slovakia may be considered a serious reason for feminization of poverty. Eliminating the feminization of poverty will depend on the extent of elimination of patriarchy, either on the part of governmental institutions or NGOs. The activities of men in western countries are an inspiration for elimination of patriarchy.

The term poverty is used not only to refer to a portion of the population of a given society, but also to refer to the society as a whole. Third world countries are considered as poor. Slovakia is a country ranking among the poorer ones, based on the population's income characteristics.

Not even the wealthiest countries of the world have been able to totally resolve their problem of poverty and have their own "third world". There is a similar situation in Slovakia. Every society has and will have its poor that will require support nets to prevent emergence and spreading of permanent poverty.

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Poverty of the Roma

Any analysis of the so-called Roma issue is subject to a certain amount of generalization. This is due to the inexactness of statistics on the Roma, as well as strong civilization-related differentiation of the Roma (Gypsy) community in Slovakia. Several statistics on the Roma community are based on the data of the 1991 census, and therefore cover only a minority of Slovakia's Roma population. Many statements concerning the Roma in Slovakia should therefore be understood as trends and/or relate to only a specific portion of the Roma community. It should be stated that a majority of Roma in Slovakia are integrated into the majority society and, above all, are not segregated from the majority society. It may therefore be misleading to see the Roma issues by reviewing only the Roma colonies.

Specificity of Roma as an Ethnic Minority

Roma is the second most numerous minority in Slovakia. During the 1991 census, less than 80,000 individuals claimed to belong to the Roma minority, representing only 1.4 percent of Slovakia's population. Estimates of Roma numbers in Slovakia, however, are several times higher. According to 1989 data of State administration municipal offices, there were 253,943 Roma living in Slovakia in that year (4.8 percent). But, these statistics only recorded individuals in social need. The numbers of Roma in Slovakia may therefore be assumed to be even higher. Expert estimates currently vary between 480,000-520,000, and these numbers keep increasing due to the Roma population's high birth rates.

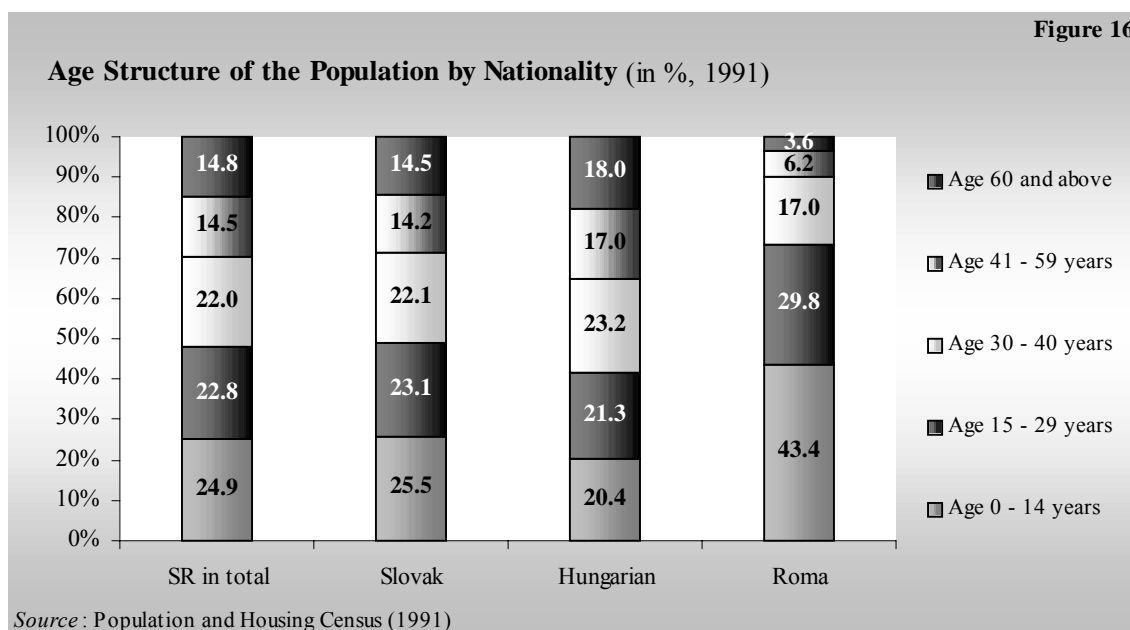
The Roma population represents a specific minority. Dealing with the so-called "Roma problem" therefore requires a more comprehensive approach. The majority of Roma in Slovakia live in a poor socio-economic situation and this raises the question whether Roma are not a social rather than an ethnic minority. Discussions have been increasingly related to the "underclass" issues that address the situation of Roma living in Roma colonies. The principal characteristics of an underclass include long-term unemployment, fragmented work career, problems finding a permanent job in the secondary labor market, and dependence on social State benefits or on activities within the shadow economics. With respect to the majority population, the underclass environment is understood as anomalous, characterized by overall resignation, little respect to authorities, weak social control, reliance on the system of supports, and the absence of working discipline/habits. These general characteristics of the underclass are typical of Roma living in Roma colonies and, more and more frequently, outside the colonies.

The Roma community is strongly differentiated internally. Various cultural and civilization branches make communication within the community and with the outside rather complicated. Some experts on Roma issues state that there are remnants of the caste system within the Roma community that determine the place of any individual within the social system. An important differentiation is the stabilization of the sub-ethnic subgroups Roma in Slovakia. The most numerous are the groups of settled Roma (Rumungers) and of nomadic – Italian Roma (Vlashica Roma), and the remainders of the German Sints represent a separate group. Also, there are differences between Roma in the language and dialects they use, and from which they also take words to be used in the Romany language. In the Slovak environment, Roma use the Slovak language and its dialects. The Hungarian language is used in Southern Slovakia. Similarly, as in the environment of the majority population, Roma in Slovakia are differentiated by their origin in urban or rural environments and their attachment to a certain region of Slovakia. All the above-mentioned differences within the Roma community need to be taken into consideration when determining how to assist with the problems of Slovakia's Roma minority.

Reproductive Behavior of Roma in Slovakia

The *demographic behavior* and the demographic reproduction of the Roma population differ from the reproductive behavior of the majority population. Its most pronounced manifestation concerns the Roma population's age structure difference as compared to the remaining population. According to the 1991 census, age structure differences are evident with respect to other ethnic groups living in Slovakia. These groups have high numbers of children below the age of 14 years, and low numbers of elderly individuals of post-productive age.

Ethnic differences are determined by several factors that are more pronounced with the Roma minority. They relate to differences in the structure and size of the Roma family. The most important factor is the long-term death rates and birth rates that have been markedly different from Slovakia's general population. Other important factors are the degree of ethnic identity, the extent of assimilation, compactness of the settlement, and percentages of nationally or ethnically mixed marriages. As far as the age structure is concerned, the most numerous age group of the Roma population are children below the age of 14 years (Figure 16). This segment makes up as much as 43.4 percent (a total of 24.9 percent for the remaining population of Slovakia). The share of the age group of 15-29 years is 29.8 percent (22.8%). Other age groups are gradually smaller in size as compared to the structure of the Slovak population: the age cohort 30-40 years 17.0 percent (22.0%), 41 to 59 years 6.2 percent (14.5%), and the age cohort 60+ has a share of 3.6 percent only on the Roma population (14.8 percent for the general population). Due to high birthrates and higher death rates, four fifths of the Roma populations consists of individuals below the age of 34 years (Bačová, Zel'ová, 1993).



The Roma family represents a demographic type entirely different from the majority family. For instance, sexual activity and partnerships frequently start below the age of 18 years. More than half of the couples/parents live together without having legalized their relationship according to the standards of the majority society. Subsequent marriage might occur even after many years of having lived together, which explains why low divorce rates are typical. Divorce as the way to terminate the first marriage was observed in only 3.7 percent of Roma males and 3.4 percent of Roma females. A multiple child Roma family is typical.

The average number of 4.2 children per Roma mother is more than twice the average 1.51 children per non-Roma population mother. The average is as high as 7.8 children per family for

Roma families living in backward colonies. Child allowances are the primary source of income for such large-size families (as suggested by the *Conceptual Plans...*, 1997). Data on the demographic behavior of the Roma population in Slovakia is strongly comparable to the data on the demographic behavior of the non-Roma population several decades ago, and is comparable to data for developing countries. As a matter of fact, the Roma population has shown a "phase delay" in its demographic development when compared to non-Roma population, and is at a stage typical for the majority several decades ago. As an example, the Roma population's infant mortality data for the 1980s were very similar to 1950s data for all of Czechoslovakia. The probable life expectancy for the Roma minority between 1970 and 1980 corresponded to the 1929-33 situation of the entire population of Czechoslovakia (for Roma males) and after W.W.II (for Roma women). The reproductive behavior of the Roma population is far from being extraordinary because it basically corresponds to the social, economic and cultural conditions of the given population group. A majority of other societies would show similar demographics and characteristics under similar conditions and socio-economic development.

Another important feature is the **regional distribution** of the Roma population with some specific characteristics. The Roma population is distributed irregularly over the territory of Slovakia, with the highest concentrations found in Eastern Slovakia and in the southern districts of Central Slovakia. This is where approximately two-thirds of the Roma population lives and where Roma make up the highest proportions of the district population. More than half of the Roma population (52.5%) in 1980 used to live in what was then the Eastern Slovakian region (the region presently has about 55 percent of the Roma population), where there were 77.3 "Gypsy" people per 1,000, compared to a corresponding national average only 40. According to the 1980 census, the Roma ethnic made up as many as 7.7 percent of the population of the Eastern Slovakian Region, with corresponding figures being 2.9 percent for Central Slovakia and 2.6 percent for Western Slovakia. By the end of 1988, the Roma minority in Eastern Slovakia grew, according to the official data, to as high as 9.1 percent of the overall population.

The shares of the Roma minority on the overall population in every district of Eastern Slovakia are high, and exceeded 10 percent in some districts as early as 1980. The Roma population can be expected to grow due to the high birth rates: e.g., one in 17 citizens of Košice was a Roma, one in 12 elementary school students and one in ten kindergarten children was a Roma. The southern districts of Central Slovakia also show high percentages of the Roma ethnic. In the 1980 census, there was more than 10 percent (14.2%) of the Roma population in Rimavská Sobota. Proportions of the Roma ethnic grow markedly, particularly in places where the reproduction rates of non-Roma population are rather low, as well as where there is a negative migration balance. With its reproductive behavior, the Roma population fills a certain "demographic vacuum". As a result, many regions of Slovakia would be unable to sustain its population at a constant level if there were no growth of the Roma population.

Another difference, compared to the majority population, is the Roma population's **settlement structure**. A majority of Slovakia's population lives in an urban environment (58 percent of the population in the early 1990s), whereas the Roma prevail in rural a settlement structure, in rural areas outside of municipalities, at the border of villages or within villages. The settlement structure of Roma living in an urban environment can be characterized as ghettos, at the outskirts of cities, or sometimes in cities. Higher concentrations of Roma population are found in regions or microregions that are among the Slovakia's marginal areas of social space and economic deprivation. The Roma population's traditional way of life is characterized by life in large communities and by rather intensive relationships within broader circles of relatives.

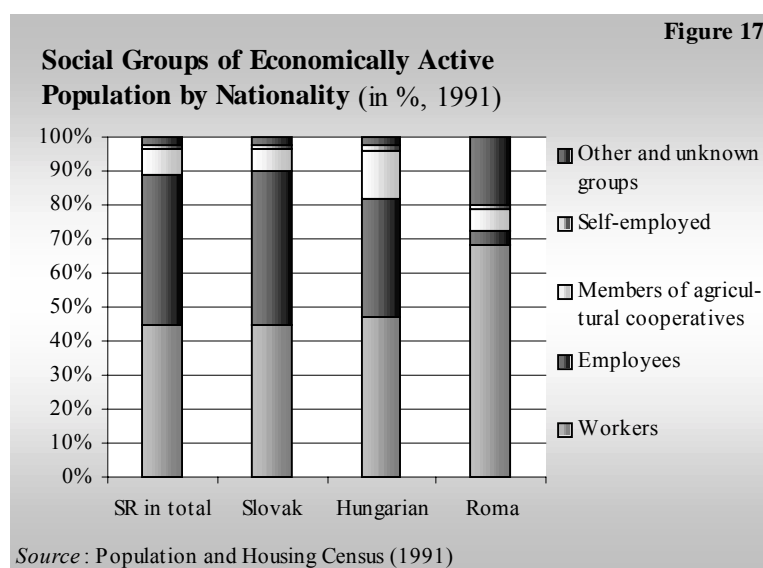
The settlement structure also suggests a significant extent of geographic segregation of Slovakia's Roma population. Regions with a high concentration of Roma population are Slovakia's most economically backwards, with big social and economic problems. No

significant migration can be expected to occur in Slovakia, since the demand has dropped for low cost unqualified labor, even in the large industrial centers. To a large extent, this reduced job opportunities, housing availability (lack of money, limited construction of housing, high prices of real estate), and stopped migration of Roma to cities and core areas of villages, which was typical of the late 1980s. The current trend is to return to the original colonies.

Another factor determining the demographic structure of the Roma family has been the *type of locality*. The type of locality and the presence of a certain form of geographic/spatial segregation of the Roma population serve as significant parameters of assimilation/dissimilation processes. Research uses classification by the type of settlements, including separate colonies, colonies at the outskirts of villages, colonies at the outskirts of cities, villages and towns. The minimal extent and the symbolic nature of social contacts are closely connected with spatial segregation, and also affect reproductive behavior. Most pronounced differences are visible with respect to reproductive behavior of Roma living in towns as compared to colonies. Families living in towns had fewer children (less than three – 59.6 percent; more than six only 9.85 percent) whereas 25.3 percent of families living in Roma colonies had three or less children, and 76.8 percent had four or more children (40.7 percent six or more children). The location of the colony also affects attitudes about the ideal number of children, to the mutual relationships between man and woman, to the value of the child, to the perception of the importance of education, etc. The place of domicile also affects the level of education achieved, as well as the socio-economic and socio-professional status.

Roma in Social Need

In Central European countries, Roma are among the social categories at the highest risk of exclusion from the labor market, and consequently, among the *socially and economically most underprivileged groups*. In addition, the socio-economic status of Roma is frequently subject to intergeneration reproduction. In the past, a majority of the Roma population would be part of the "traditional old" poverty and formed visible "poverty islands". With the appearance of industrialization, their handicaps accumulated, and Roma found themselves among the lower social categories. After 1989, the transformation period resulted in large proportions of the Roma population being categorized as "losers of transformation" rather than categorized as "winners". The transformation of the economy failed to resolve the problem of marginalized groups of the population, and Roma have become unemployed despite spending own efforts to reverse their unfavorable situation.



Slovakia's Roma are, to a significant extent, homogeneous both from the aspect of their economic class and from their qualification level (Bačová, Zel'ová, 1993). When it comes to the socio-professional status, a majority of them are unqualified laborers. As a result of this status, they have become members of Slovakia's low-income groups. Bačová (1990) confirms this fact when she speaks of a certain "monotype" of the Roma family from the viewpoint of employment. This is the type of families that have unqualified jobs – laborers with no vocational or general secondary education, with low average income per family member, and with a male who works outside the municipality of his domicile. Ten years after the publication of these findings, the unemployment rates of Roma males grows due to mass unemployment in certain regions of Slovakia. As a result, the number of Roma families with unemployed adults keep growing.

The **lack of education** in Roma results in the labor market being closed to them. It also affects the overall socio-economic status and the social potential of the Roma minority. Compared to the preceding period, Roma began cumulating in the secondary labor market since the demand for low cost labor dropped and employment in industrial sectors was reduced. Roma job seekers go to the end of "queuing" job seekers in the labor market. These facts result in the Roma minority being one of the social groups at the highest risk of unemployment.

Long-term and permanent **unemployment** is widespread among the Roma population due to their cumulated handicaps. The result is poverty and the appearance of so-called **poverty cycle** and the **unemployment trap**. Roma then become dependent on social assistance benefits that are offered by State social policy institutions. This results in extremely high rates of long-term unemployment, with intergenerational repetition of this condition. The number of families with long-term unemployed parents and children keeps growing, with the children never experiencing a permanent job. This also creates preconditions for the emergence and repetition of a subculture of unemployed Roma youth with features of pathological behavior.

In considering Roma colonies or socio-spatial marginality of the territory, socially anomalous conditions develop. These territories sometimes have unemployment rates as high as 100 percent. This creates a situation that is referred to in Slovakia as "starving valleys", i.e., the existence of territories with "visible poverty islands". In "starving valleys", there is a threat of total social disorganization and a **poverty culture** as the only possible method to efficiently adjust the situation. This leads to the formation of a so-called underclass, both urban and rural. In the post-communist countries, this situation has a significant ethnic nature.

According to the 1991 census, most Roma have primary education (76.68%) while only 8.07 percent have completed apprentice schools without a secondary school diploma. Less than 2 percent of the entire Roma population attended secondary vocational schools, obtained a complete secondary education, or obtained a university education.

A number of factors, including employment status, place in the labor market, constancy of earning from employment, education level reached, and family structure currently determine status within the social structure. These factors are interlinked and co-determine a person's socio-economic status. The aforementioned handicaps for a significant proportion of the Roma families create risks of poverty and a life in conditions of poverty and social dependence. A marginalized status is emerging, perceived by the majority population as negative. Roma are being perceived as a social category that caused its own poverty and is not motivated to improve their status. Most of the majority population believe that perceived Roma personal characteristics (laziness, lack of strong will, poor working discipline, disinterest in education, inability to manage income, etc.) as the cause of poverty, rather than structural reasons (poverty as the result of injustice in the society). Most of the majority population blames the Roma as personally responsible for their status. *This is a stigmatization that may mouth into social*

exclusion and into the emergence of the culture of poverty and dependence on the social security system.

Up to 80 percent of the Roma population is dependent on the State social net (12.5 percent of the unemployed, 60 percent of children and women in household, and 7 percent of pensioners). There are about 60,000 unemployed Roma recorded in Slovakia, representing about 18 percent of the total number of unemployed. While there are no exact unemployment rates statistics for the Roma, estimates can be made based on an assessment of Slovakia's problem regions. Unemployment rates are the highest in regions that have the largest Roma population. Only data of the Statistical Office (Microcensus) can be used because there have been no specific surveys that focus specifically on the socio-economic situation of Roma households. The 1997 Microcensus data provides information on socially needy households whose income did not reach the set subsistence minimum level, and therefore qualified for State social support benefits. This information shows that families with children, representing 60 percent of socially dependent households, remain at the greatest risk of poverty (Woleková, 1998). The Microcensus data also reveals that over 70 percent of households with children had low or modest income. Of the total number of 162,066 low-income households, there were 155,260 households with dependent children aged below 15 years. Poverty and social dependence are the concern of families with multiple dependent children. The number of earning adult persons in a household also impacts the degree of poverty and social dependence.

The fact that most unemployed young Roma have no chance to get a job is a serious problem. Young Roma who completed mandatory school attendance have not continued to be trained for an occupation. They are simply recorded as unemployed and receive social benefits. This does not provide them any motivation to get additional education and training. When a Roma child continues to be trained, it also draws money from the family budget. Parents are not aware of the importance of education and usually prevent their children from getting further training.



Table 33

Shares of Recorded Unemployed Roma on the Total Number of Unemployed (%)

Region	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1999 ^a
Bratislava	-	-	-	-	-	5.01	4.34
Trnava	-	-	-	-	-	5.71	7.58
Trenčín	-	-	-	-	-	3.58	3.58
Nitra	-	-	-	-	-	9.81	7.93
Žilina	-	-	-	-	-	4.43	3.12
Banská Bystrica	-	-	-	-	-	26.29	22.74
Prešov	-	-	-	-	-	29.20	2.455
Košice	-	-	-	-	-	35.62	28.05
Total	15.47	13.97	12.41	16.61	18.96	19.19	15.84

Note: a. As of August 31, 1999.

Source: Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family of the Slovak Republic.

The *unemployment of Roma women*, who barely make their way in the labor market, is an additional problem. The percentage of social benefits recipients in the total number of unemployed recorded with Labor Offices, and the number of job seekers are most critical in the districts of Spišská Nová Ves, Rimavská Sobota, Lučenec, Rožňava, Košice, Michalovce, and Trebišov. These are districts with high concentrations of Roma population.

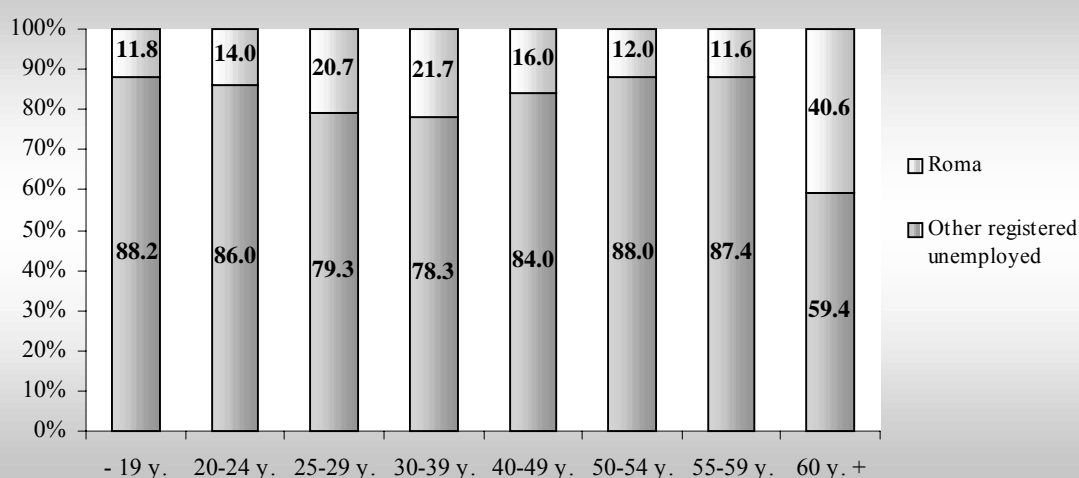
Unemployment rates for young Roma have reached a culturally ethnic dimension. Roma localities with 80-100 percent unemployment rates fell to the social net and cannot find any way out. Unemployed young people aged 14-24 years make up as many as almost 25 percent (62,532) of all the jobs seekers recorded, with more than 60 percent of young unemployed Roma trying to find a job for more than three years. Young and already large families in this group are unable to change their social situation without outside assistance.

Measures taken by State administration authorities in both passive and active employment policies focused on the creation of jobs of public interest (in 1995 and 1996) as well as on retraining in so-called traditional folk crafts. The effect of these measures on the labor market has remained negligible. The State therefore continues to take further steps to artificially "reduce" unemployment by eliminating "non-cooperating" job seekers from the records. The deepening socio-economic crisis has resulted in soaring crime rates, eroded relationships with the majority population, and ethnic conflicts.

Figure 19

Share of Roma on Total Registered Unemployed, by Age Groups

(in %, as of June 30, 1999)



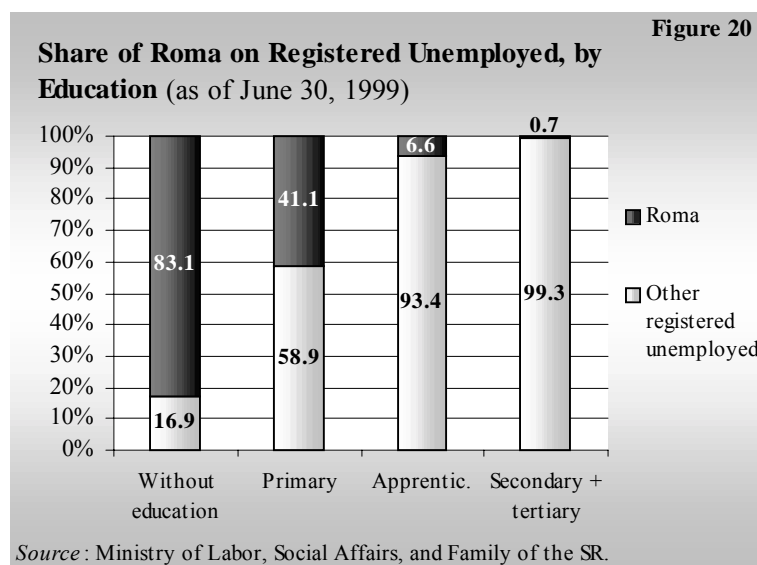
Source: Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family of the SR.

Table 34

Structure of Unemployed by Duration of Recorded Unemployment (as of June 30, 1999)

Duration of Records	Recorded Unemployed in Total (RUT)	Roma	Share of Roma on RUT (%)
For less than 6 months	194,737	10,380	5.33
For more than 12 months	194,657	59,176	30.40
For more than 24 months	100,020	40,922	40.91
For more than 48 months	42,861	22,399	52.26

Source: Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family of the Slovak Republic.



Health Condition of the Roma Population

The unfavorable socio-economic situation and the associated unsatisfactory conditions of housing and infrastructure at the place of domicile are causes for the current health conditions of Slovakia's Roma. Statistical data on the health of Slovakia's population are, in a majority of cases, not differentiated based on specific ethnic or nationality. But some data indicates there are health differences between the Roma population and the majority population. With some reservations (since many findings do not apply to the entire Roma population), these sources and data indicate that the health condition of a majority of Roma ethnic persons is worse than that of Slovakia's non-Roma population.

Most published data dealing with the health condition of Slovakia's population currently focus on high incidences of infectious and sexually transmitted diseases among Roma. They show that infectious diseases in the Roma population exceed levels found in the majority population. Disease rates connected with insufficient hygiene, poverty, and other exogenous reasons (starvation, poor quality of housing) therefore become especially serious. In

Box 11

Health Situation in Colonies

In particular, the health situation in Roma colonies is alarming. The incidence of diseases of the upper airways has been growing dramatically since 1989, and some colonies have even experienced the spread of tuberculosis. As a result of the factors mentioned above, there is a risk of outbreaks of various diseases. Typical examples of widespread conditions are diseases of the skin and sexually transmitted diseases; injuries are also frequent. Roma children suffer from infectious diseases that do not affect the majority of the population. A significant threat is meningitis. In addition, high proportions of mental retardation are connected with the socially underprivileged environment.

a portion of the Roma population, poverty leads to deprivation in many dimensions. This results in a shorter life expectancy, high frequencies of diseases, chronic diseases, and permanent reduction of physical and mental performance. Data on health care warn of a poor communication between Roma and health professionals, and of an insufficient understanding of the importance of health prevention on the part of some Roma. All the data available suggest an ongoing deterioration of the health condition, particularly in persons that live in the spreading isolated Roma colonies. After 1989, there was deterioration even in areas where the communist establishment had succeeded in dealing with health condition issues of the Roma population (reduced infant mortality, increasing life expectancy, and elimination of some diseases).

All the aforementioned factors are reflected in the average *life expectancy* for the Roma population. The figure is 55 years for Roma males and 59 for Roma females. These figures are approximately 13 and 17 years less respectively than figures for the general population. In 1998, the respective life expectancy at birth was 76.7 and 68.6 years for the Slovak population females and males.

Health-related measures oriented toward the identification of diseases, early diagnosis, and treatment of diseases among Slovakia's population have always been directed toward the entire population without any discrimination. Large health-related campaigns were gradually organized and launched, such as abating TBC, poliomyelitis, and vaccination against infectious disease, and surveys of Roma colonies. Jurová (1993) reported that many diseases still affect people living in Roma colonies in spite of elimination of outbreaks of typhoid fever, enteric fever, and despite efforts spent to deal with specific conditions such as trachoma, diseases of the airways, enteric diseases and syphilis at the national level. The most frequently occurrences are scabies, pediculosis, pyoderma, mycosis, ascariidosis, sequel of chronic alcoholism and crime-related injuries. Also, cases of consumption of meat from perished animals with subsequent diseases of the digestive tract have been recorded.

The Housing Situation of Roma

Dissatisfaction with housing and its quality is a factor that creates a perception of an unfavorable socio-economic situation. The most pronounced features of this phenomenon for the Roma minority include *spatially isolated and segregated Roma colonies*. Their numbers have grown by 238, i.e., from 278 Roma colonies recorded in 1988 to 516 colonies recorded in 1997 (official statistical survey). Twenty Roma colonies do not even have a source of drinking water, 15 more than in 1988. A majority of the colonies also face problems of insufficient infrastructure – low quality drinking water and roads, absence of public lighting, no sewerage, gas supply, social establishments, unsatisfactory conditions of housing, no shops, Post offices, schools, etc. The 15 Roma colonies in 1988 without public lighting had increased to 251 by 1997. The 7 Roma colonies in 1988 with no hard access road increased to 34 by 1997.

The numbers of housing units in Roma colonies have increased by 12,361, from 1973 units in Roma colonies in 1988 to 14,334 recorded in 1997. The number of families in Roma colonies increased from 2,543 in 1988 to 22,785 by 1997, an increase of 20,242. The number of Roma families living in shacks also grew, by 2,063, from 2,543 families in 1989 to 4,606 in 1997. The total population living in Roma colonies has grown by 108,046, from 14,988 people in 1988 to 123,034 in 1997.

The number of Roma families per 1 shack in the colony remained at 1.3, the same level as in 1988. Although huge numbers of Roma returned to the colonies, the number of families sharing one shack was maintained thanks to the construction of new shanties. Similarly, the number of persons living in one dwelling in Roma colonies only grew by one, from 7.6 persons per dwelling in 1988 to 8.6 persons in 1997. This figure refers to the group of Roma individuals

who returned to the colonies to their families who were living in existing dwellings. This move was due to a worsening of the individual's socio-economic status. In that particular year, local State administration authorities recorded a total of 591 "dwelling groupings at a low socio-cultural level" (=Roma colonies). Of those Roma colonies, 41 lack a source of drinking water and there are no access roads built to 50 colonies. 94 colonies have still no public lighting and 1,202 out of the total number of 13,882 dwellings have no electricity connection. Some colonies have no electricity at all. Of the number of dwellings mentioned (3,493), as many as 25.2 percent have been built as temporary shelter with randomly acquired materials (timber, sheets of iron) that do not meet basic national standards. In 1998, a total of 4,838 families lived in such dwellings. There are 1.4 families on average living in each such dwelling, which usually consist of a single room.

Roma housing problems cannot be resolved without addressing some Roma community members' antisocial attitudes. This problem was experienced in the 1980s when dealing with Roma housing issues at the Košice residential quarter Luník IX. A political decision was made to move Roma families to 204 apartments that met regular standards. The Roma were moved there without considering the families' cultural level and the degree of integration. As a result, the environment and the units themselves became devastated and became a Roma ghetto. The non-Roma population left the remaining 300 units, and delinquents from Košice who failed to pay rent (almost exclusively Roma) occupied the units.

Housing construction after 1989 has generally been unsatisfactory. Even though there are different sources of financing (home-savings, limited State loans, developing mortgage loans), there is yet no sufficiently developed system in place that would enable an individual with average income to acquire a dwelling in a reasonable time. The public thus responds to any form of injustice in housing policy, allocation of apartments, and extension of soft credits. This does not concern just the Roma, but also other groups (e.g., expatriates moved from the Chernobyl area, antisocial individuals). It is therefore important to support individual Roma efforts for resolving their housing problems by enabling them to construct (under a regulated scheme) dwelling structures that meet basic standards of housing. That effort involves issues such as acquisition of land, surveillance, and legislation. Roma must not be segregated into isolated areas from the aspect of the town planning.

The Education Level of the Roma Population

Compared to other segments of the Slovak society, the *level of education of Roma is substandard*. Significant portions of the Roma population have an incomplete primary education. An important indicator of success is the type of the settlement they live in. This measure is most significant for isolated Roma colonies, and – in many cases – it is being transferred from generation to generation. Experts speak of a cumulation of handicaps that cause a high level of multiple deprivations, and leave this portion of the Roma ethnic in a social vacuum. There are additional numbers of circumstances that result in the minimum necessary level of education is not being achieved:

- *Closing up of the opportunities to find one's way in the primary labor market.* Currently, the Roma minority finds itself in front of a closed secondary labor market.
- *Overall stigmatization and marginalization.* A large proportion of the Slovak non-Roma population perceives unemployment and poverty as being caused by the Roma themselves. They associate the reasons with laziness, a choice of incorrect life strategies, and poor management by Roma families.

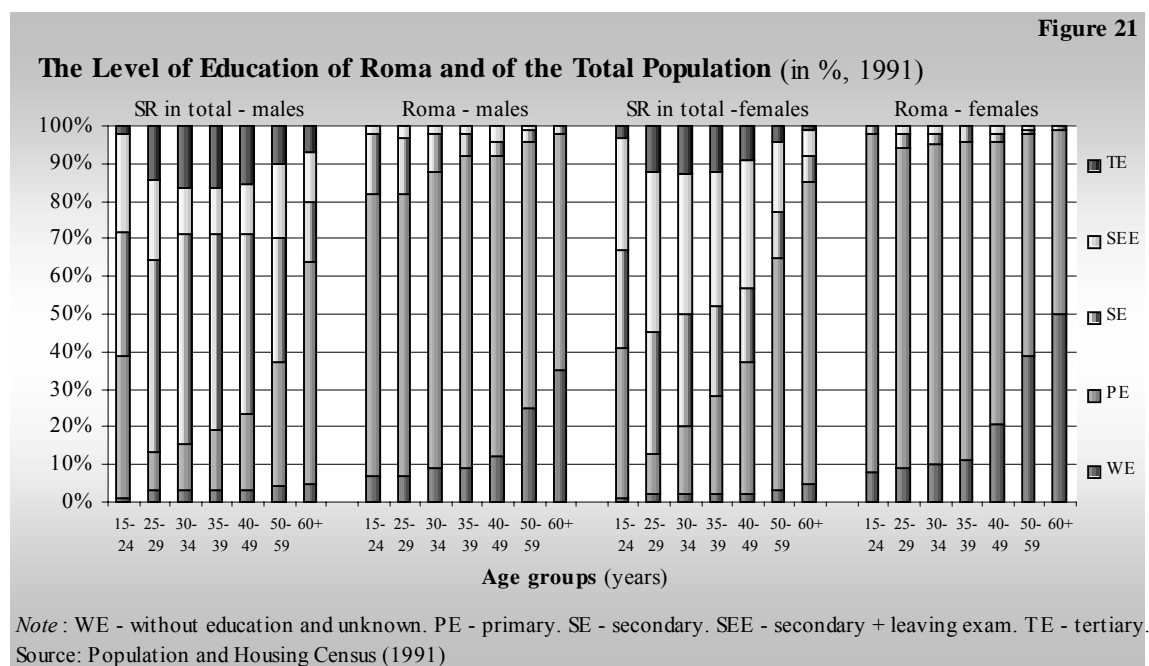
As early as grade one of the primary school, many Roma are not able to cope with the curricula. According to a 1991-1995 survey, 22 percent of Roma learners do not perform well (*Conceptual Plans...*, 1997). Only about 1-2 percent of all pupils at both degrees of the primary

school fail to progress to higher grades while 8-16 percent of Roma fail to progress. A 1990 survey indicates that 56 percent of male Roma respondents and 59 percent of female Roma respondents had not completed even primary school level. When compared to the majority population, Roma show low rates of completed secondary education (only 0.9-1%). In general, there are very few Roma learners at the secondary schools, most of them (about 8%) being trained at secondary vocational establishments for apprentices. Statistically, the percentage of Roma with university education is negligible (less than 0.5 percent).

The aforementioned problems are the underlying reasons for Roma children being placed into special schools, despite the fact that the majority of them meet the intellectual requirements for the attendance of regular primary schools. So-called "Gypsy" classes are being established and are a manifestation of social exclusion. A possible preventive measure that can be expected to resolve the issue of Roma education levels, and thus their cultural capital, is the introduction of so-called "zero classes", i.e., preparatory classes for Roma children to be attended prior to mandatory school attendance. Another option is to establish classes with Romany as the teaching language. This would indirectly continue the period of the real socialism where attendance of the highest kindergarten class was mandatory. Here children receive the opportunity to acquire hygienic skills, learn or improve their proficiency of the majority language, and get accustomed to authority, etc. The issue of a positive discrimination of Roma for enrollment to universities is not yet a controversial problem since it only concerns a very small percentage of Roma youth. When one surveys statistics on Roma at universities, it can be seen (and this has been repeatedly mentioned) that children of Roma origin attending universities are not a part of statistical reports since the majority population perceives them as "trouble free" assimilated Roma.

Pedagogical and psychological probes have provided evidence for unjustified inclusion of Roma children into special schools for handicapped children. Roma currently represent the highest proportions of students at special teaching institutions. Most Roma children have been sent to special schools based on an assessment of insufficient health, nutrition, and educational care on the part of their parents. This care begins during the prenatal period and continues after the birth, with frequently unsatisfactory nutrition of the infant, and by the child being raised in socio-cultural conditions that are threatening its health and life. Numerous secondary negative aspects have accumulated due to the lack of respect by the communist establishment toward ethnic and language differences. This gradually dissolved traditional ethnic habits, traditional culture and social conditions, as well as the tribal hierarchy.

Figure 21



The Current Approach to So-called Roma Issues in Slovakia

The Constitution of the Slovak Republic adopted by the National Council of the Slovak Republic on 1 September 1992 stipulates – with no exceptions and in an imperative manner – the equality of all citizens, regardless of their nationality, religion, faith, social group (Art. 12(2)). Members of national minorities have the right to gain proficiency in the official language, the right to establish and maintain teaching and cultural institutions, be provided with information in their mother tongues, the right to use their mother tongue in official communication, and to participate in the solution of matters concerning national and ethnic minorities (Art. 34, 35 of the Constitution). International organizations, such as the Council of Europe, have not criticized the Slovak legal regulation concerning the status of minorities. Even the known Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe No. 1201 of 1993 focused only on some supplements to the existing legal regulation, without suggesting the necessity of any amendments.

The Vice-Prime Minister of the Slovak Government for human rights, minorities and regional development, Mr. Pál Csáky submitted to the government a new strategy for dealing with Roma ethnic minority issues. This happened in two stages. The Slovak Government adopted, on 27 September 1999, *Resolution No. 821/1999 on the Slovak Government's strategy to deal with issues of the Roma ethnic minority, and on the set of measures for its implementation – stage I*. It is interesting that the Resolution was adopted in an extraordinary session of the Government.

The Strategy (*Stage I*) contains concise and generally formulated principal theses describing the current status of the Roma population in Slovakia, as well as suggestions for scenarios. The Strategy has been relatively well developed with respect to culture and education, and it identifies the areas where Roma are discriminated against. It also suggests ways of dealing with the situation. A weak point of the Strategy is the social area chapter that identifies major problems concerning the Roma population. These problems include unemployment, lack of job opportunities in the labor market, and insufficient links between the systems of social assistance benefits and unemployment benefits. Suggestions for the solutions to these most serious problems of the Roma national minority are to a significant extent very vague. A major problem with the new strategy of the government is the alarming and unfavorable socio-economic status of the Roma minority, and the need to start implementing specific projects as

soon as possible. It does not seem reasonable that a new Roma strategy be required every time a new government is formed. The Strategy adopted in November 1997 could have been slightly amended and applied immediately after the 1998 elections. In trying to predict future efforts, we already see that the government formed for 2002 parliamentary elections will again initiate the development of a new, special concept of the Government's approach to Roma, and such drafting may take a half of the term.

The incorporation of the *In-Process Strategy of the Slovak Government to resolve problems of the Roma national minority* into a set of specific measures for the year 2000 – *Stage II* – was approved by the Slovak Government at its session on 5 May, 2000 (*Government's Resolution No. 870/2000*). It is much more detailed than the Strategy adopted in September 1999 and concerns both individual areas of interest and a list of institutions in charge at national, regional, district, and – at some places – even local levels. Based on the Government's Resolution No. 821/1999, the government instructed ministers and Regional Office managers to develop specific measures for the Strategy in year 2000, including their funding from their own budgetary chapters. The Strategy submitters have thus involved all levels of State administration for dealing with Roma ethnic minority problems. In addition, links have been created between the State administration and the activities of non-governmental organizations. The Strategy is based on civil principles, and stresses a positive stimulation of the Roma population. In some areas, this may be understood as a measure leading to positive discrimination (affirmative action). The draft set of measures for the year 2000 gives preference to areas of interest that, according to the drafters, present a critical situation. The areas are human rights, training and education, issues of unemployment, housing, the social area, as well as issues concerning the health condition. Several chapters vaguely allocate funds for specific tasks and/or the tasks that require funds which were not available in 2000 or by the end of the present government's term. However, the In-Process Strategy addressed the problems of the Roma ethnic minority in a detailed manner. It specifically defines the problems and tasks, focuses on marginal regions and sub-regions, and on the economic transformation of affected areas. It provides the most detailed concepts adopted by the Slovak Government after 1989.

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