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Slovakia: School year finishes without any progress towards ending segregation of Romani children

Another school year has finished with thousands of Romani children segregated in inferior education, in separate mainstream schools and classes or in special schools and classes for pupils with “mild mental disabilities”.

Violations of Romani children’s right to education without discrimination continue despite the government’s commitment, in August 2010, to adopt measures to end school segregation on the basis of ethnic origin. Amnesty International is concerned that the Slovak government that took office in July 2010 has failed to the present day to adopt any concrete measures towards that end.

Although Slovak law prohibits discrimination and segregation in education, the authorities have failed to ensure the necessary steps are taken for its enforcement in practice. This failure is a result of a series of shortcomings in law and policy, including lack of an adequate definition of segregation, and failure to monitor and identify cases, collect disaggregated data and impose sanctions for schools and authorities that violate the law.

As a consequence, Romani children are denied equal access to quality education.

On 13 June, the Ministry of Education made available for public comments the draft Concept of Primary and Secondary Education; a strategic document outlining the principles of education with the objective of providing the framework for reforms within the Slovak educational system. Amnesty International is deeply concerned that the document does not list the principles of non-discrimination and enforcement of the ban of segregation, as explicit objectives of the reform. The organization is also concerned that the draft Concept addresses the issue of segregation in a ‘piecemeal’ rather than systemic manner.

Amnesty International welcomes the draft Concept’s inclusion of some recommendations to address the problem of school segregation of Romani children, such as the recommendation for the adoption of a definition of ‘segregation’ in the anti-discrimination law, and its recognition of the need to monitor, evaluate and publish information on segregation and desegregation practices of schools. The draft Concept also recommends the provision of support measures for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and for pupils with disabilities so that they can be educated within the mainstream school system.

Amnesty International notes with concern that in some instances the draft Concept uses language which further stigmatizes Romani children currently experiencing discrimination. It suggests that the lack of access to quality education for “marginalized groups” is a result, among other things, of an “indirect interest in segregation from the side of the Romani community,” and of a “natural self-defence of the majority from the unadjustable citizens” (sic) who are described as prone to “ill-hygiene, stealing, physical attacks, etc.”

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that the government’s commitment to address this human rights scandal so far remains only on paper. The organization is further concerned that this commitment does not seem to be founded on a genuine acknowledgment of existing systemic discrimination and segregation within the school system. In a recent letter of 6 May 2011 to Amnesty International the State Secretary of the Ministry of Education notes: “...everyone has access to

education, including Romani children. The educational system in Slovakia guarantees Romani children's access to education and we reject any discrimination or segregation."

The letter goes on to state that "the responsibility for the status of the Romani community and Romani children does not fall only with the Slovak government, but the responsibility lies mainly with the Roma themselves...Without their initiative, effort and good will to change their lives it is impossible to achieve good results for all citizens of Slovakia."

Amnesty International is concerned that this attitude is not conducive to bringing about the real change that is currently needed in Slovakia. Romani parents cannot be held to blame for serious and systematic failures of the state, which perpetuate injustice, discrimination and poverty. Accountability for the elimination of discriminatory barriers and for the successful integration of Romani children into mainstream education lies with the Slovak government. This responsibility cannot be abdicated on the basis of real or perceived parental shortcomings.

Amnesty International has been raising concerns over entrenched discrimination and segregation of Romani children in Slovak schools with the Slovak government since 2007. In September 2010, the organization recommended a set of measures to be taken by the government in order to ensure the prohibition of segregation is enforced and put into practice.

The Slovak government must take immediate measures to address the unlawful practice of segregation of Romani children in the educational system. The human cost of lack of action in this matter is too high: it affects the lives of thousands of children and traps them in a cycle of poverty and discrimination.

This work is part of Amnesty International's Demand Dignity Campaign, which focuses on human rights violations that drive and deepen poverty. As part of the campaign, Amnesty International is calling on all governments to ensure that victims of human rights violations, including economic, social and cultural rights have effective remedies. Amnesty International is calling on all governments to recognise economic, social and cultural rights in national law, remove obstacles to access to justice and comply with the human rights decisions of courts and international human rights mechanisms.

Read further

[End segregation of Romani children in Slovakia's schools](#)

[Unlock their future: End segregation of Romani children in Slovakia's schools - School progress report](#)

[Unlock their future: End the segregation of Romani children in Slovakia's schools:](#)

[Steps to end segregation in education: Briefing to the government of Slovakia:](#)

[A tale of two schools: Segregating Roma into Special Education in Slovakia](#)

[Still separate, Still Unequal: Violations of the right to education for Romani children in Slovakia](#)

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