



European Commission
Representation in Slovakia

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Subject: Standpoint on selected points of the Report on Slovakia 2019

The Coalition for Inclusive Education (hereinafter referred to as the Inclucoalition), which brings together teaching and professional staff, parents, academics, experts, analysts and NGOs to support all children to equal access to education, welcomed the Report on Slovakia 2019 presented by the European Commission on February 27, 2019. We would like to contribute to the complexity of the education of all children in Slovakia; therefore, we would like to present our suggestions and comments on two parts of this report:

Social inclusion and poverty alleviation

In this part, the report does not mention the state of social inclusion and poverty alleviation of all identified at-risk disadvantaged groups in Slovakia. It would be appropriate to ask the Slovak Republic for a comprehensive analytical report concerning, for example, children and families with disabilities. In the report part, where the area of de-institutionalization of children in orphanages and the level of substitute care is monitored, the report merely states that, for example, *"prevention of placement of children with disabilities in institutional care for longer periods will require specialized follow-up investments"*. The reasons for placing children with disabilities in institutional care should be added. We are sure that the absence of a comprehensive, and therefore super-departmental support for families with children with disabilities also plays a role in the resignation of a child's parent with disabilities to parental rights.

The data from the Association of Providers and Supporters of Early Intervention say that in 2017, only 561 families with children with disabilities used social early intervention services across Slovakia, accounting for only 3.7% of the total number of children who would be eligible for the service. Early intervention is in the form of early care also provided by some Special Educational Counseling Centers, but in 2017, service availability was only at the level of 11% of the target group of children with disabilities at 0 - 3 years of age.¹ The high percentage of children with disabilities who do not have access to basic compensation for child with disabilities (availability and free of therapeutic services), to specialized healthcare for these children and to other functional social services that are common standards in other EU countries also appear problematic (such as relief service, nursing service). Their inaccessibility is not only a reason that leads to the collapse of the whole family of a child with disabilities, but in some cases even to resignation to their parental rights. As for children from a socially disadvantaged background, they are virtually unable to engage in any early age support program.

The absence of the above-mentioned services of several government departments and the absence of their interdepartmental coordination is also followed by the violation of rights of children with disabilities to have access to education, as the possibility of placing a child in a normal kindergarten is

¹ FRIČOVÁ, M., MATEJ, V., TICHÁ, E. Report on the State of Early Intervention in Slovakia. Association of Providers and Supporters of Early Intervention, 2018.



so difficult that pre-school preparation of these children is essentially absent. At present, the proportion of children with disabilities in kindergartens is only 1.35% of the total population of children in kindergartens², while in primary schools 11.07% of pupils. The low level of involvement of children with disabilities in pre-school education is the result of several barriers that children and their families face in accessing education. As many as 45% of children with disabilities are educated separately from their peers in special classes and special schools³, while hundreds of children are excluded from education altogether because schools are unable to create the basic conditions for their education due to insufficient system support from the state (eg ensure the presence of teacher assistants). In the case of forced exclusion from education, segregation of the child from peers occurs during the period of compulsory schooling. Secondary segregates another family member - usually the child's mother who stays at home. This causes a gradual loss of her work habits, which loses equal opportunities in the labor market, sometimes access to the labor market is impossible for her. This leads to permanent loss of family income, the poverty and often to the disintegration of the family of a child with disabilities.

Education and qualifications

We are aware of the fact that the situation of children and pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds is alarming in Slovakia and the Report describes it well. However, in our opinion, it is not possible to focus only on one group of children when assessing the condition of inclusive education. The Coalition understands the concept of inclusive education in the context of supporting and accompanying **all** children based on their current individual needs, as well as the needs of all participants in education (families, teachers, etc.). Therefore, we would like to point out that in Slovakia there are also other groups of children at risk in terms of quality and accessibility of education: children with disabilities, gifted children, but also every single child who is at risk for any reason. It is shown in the results of PISA , where we are below the OECD average in the area of wellbeing, as well we have very low levels of soft skills, critical thinking and mathematical and scientific literacy. This is not only the case for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and underdeveloped regions; in the weakest (risk) groups is almost a quarter of pupils from the ordinary population. We can only say that under the current system of Slovak education no children receive good support for the development of their potential.

We would also like to point out that the adoption of the new *National Reform Program in the area of education and training* is not a guarantee of the necessary changes, as this program as a whole does not have a state budget coverage and does not reflect the real political will to increase the percentage of GDP devoted to quality of education. Based on our experience with negotiations with representatives of the education sector and other political elites, as well as the failures of previous reform efforts, we would like to draw your attention to the risk of only formal declaration of commitment to a systemic change effort. As an example may serve, the currently submitted Act on Educational and Professional Employees, which does not bring any innovation, lack the strengthening of democratization principles in schools does not guarantee the quality of further education. Similarly, we also see the inadequate ability of the education sector to submit quality national or demand-oriented projects from EU funds aimed at, for example, quality education for teachers and professionals in the field of inclusive education or the availability of quality services. In the context of ensuring equal access of all

² CVTI SR. Statistical Yearbook 2018/2019. Available at: http://www.cvtisr.sk/cvti-sr-vedecka-kniznica/informacie-ostatne/statistiky/statisticka-rocenka-publikacia.html?page_id=9580

³ CVTI SR. Statistical Yearbook 2018/2019. Available at: http://www.cvtisr.sk/cvti-sr-vedecka-kniznica/informacie-ostatne/statistiky/statisticka-rocenka-publikacia.html?page_id=9580

COALITION FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (INCLUCOALISION)



children to quality education, we would like to draw attention to the following barriers and problems of the education system in Slovakia:

- Acute shortage of professional staff (psychologist, special educator, curative educator, field workers and others) in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, not reflecting the need to build **professional teams in schools** with the financial security directly in the state budget and not through structural funds.
- Insufficient system of preparation and postgraduate education of pedagogical and professional employees in the area of support of inclusive education and new methods and forms of work with children focused on comprehensive support of their development. For this purpose, long term we have not been able to make effective and efficient use of dedicated resources from Structural Funds.
- Insufficient effort of the Ministry of Education to communicate with all concerned on the functioning of school counseling facilities, resignation for effective support of the counseling system.
- The non-enforceability of the fundamental constitutional rights of children with special educational needs, manifested mainly by the insufficient allocation of funds to a group of job positions, a teacher's assistant, a teaching assistant or an assistant educator, so that their number in schools represents about 40% of the real need.
- The exemption of children with disabilities from compulsory schooling is often a forced choice also because the system of ordinary and special schools cannot provide them with adequate material-technical conditions, personnel resources and necessary support services. Over the past seven years, the number of children who have been educated at home for their health disadvantage has risen by a third.

As representatives of the Coalition for Inclusive Education (Inclucoalision), we hereby allow the above-mentioned facts to be brought to the attention of the European Commission and, at the same time, be asked to consider them in the preparation of the Reports on Slovakia for the coming years. In fact, the results in the area of education are significantly deteriorating across Slovakia and explaining this fact as regional and socio-economic differences are perceived as insufficient. In our opinion, it is therefore of the utmost importance that such commitments, programs and policies be imposed on Slovakia, that will inclusive support for all children, families and schools not only declare, but also ensure that it is effectively implemented in the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is part of the legal order of the Slovak Republic since, 2010. At the same time, we would like to state that we will always be ready to provide the Commission with any necessary assistance and cooperation in the developing analyzes of quality of education and support of inclusion in the Slovak Republic.

InkluCiTy
Platform of Families
of Children with Health Disability

Slovak Chamber of Teachers
Open Society Foundation
To dá rozum
Social Inclusion of Learners
Association of Curative Educators
Roma Education - EduRoma

Coalition for Children of Slovakia
Slovak Children Foundation
Pontis Foundation

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