



**Economic and Social  
Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2003/NGO/155  
12 March 2003

ENGLISH ONLY

---

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Fifty-ninth session  
Item 13 of the provisional agenda

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement\* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental  
organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated  
in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 February 2003]

---

\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the  
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Roma children in countries applying for EU accession - Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland

Although all the above-mentioned countries now have government programmes in place aimed at improving the situation of the Roma minority, encouraged in particular by the negotiations on accession to the European Union, the position of Roma children reveals the existence of widespread racism and discrimination against this minority group. The poor quality of school education is a universal feature, with the majority of children who do in fact receive an education attending either schools for the less-gifted or others set up in Roma ghettos and where they receive only four years schooling. As a result their chances of gaining access to the employment market are greatly reduced. This is particularly disturbing as the unemployment rate among Roma in all of the above countries is currently between 70% and 90%. This situation encourages the prejudices of the majority population who regard the Roma as social parasites who are too idle to work. As a result of the poor quality education provided for example in Bulgaria the proportion of Roma with an inadequate command of the Bulgarian language is increasing. Before 1989 120,000 Roma children attended school; the number today is barely 50,000. The reason for this is the economic situation, which has affected the Roma minority particularly severely. Only 12% of Roma children attend elementary school compared with 54% of Bulgarian children. 60% of the children in children's homes are young Roma. The likelihood of Roma children drifting into criminality or prostitution is many times greater than it is for Bulgarian children.

In Poland too, Roma children are segregated at school, in special classes for the less-gifted. Attacks on young Roma by skinheads are commonplace. The culprits are not pursued or punished. That makes the absolutely disproportionate force used by police in these countries when dealing with young Roma very disquietening. Training for the security forces has not so far produced any measurable improvement.

Hungary's better economic position has meant that more programmes for the integration and education of the Roma can be funded but further effort is needed to combat the widespread and routine racism against Roma. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia also Roma children are sent to special schools for the less-gifted. They and their parents often live in ghettos and camps on the outskirts of towns and villages, in sub-standard accommodation and with inadequate health care. Access to vocational training or higher education is very much more difficult for them as a result.

Health care provision for Roma children also tends to be much worse than the local average. Because their parents are often unemployed the children are not covered by any medical insurance schemes and they are often denied assistance by the public health care services. Inadequate health care provision means that 50% of the Roma families in Bulgaria have at least one member who is chronically sick while 15-30% of families include someone suffering from a disability.

We urge the U.N. Commission for Human Rights to condemn violations of the rights of Roma children in the countries applying for admission to the E.U. We call on the U.N.'s Special Rapporteur on the Rights of the Child to investigate the position of Roma children in Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia and

we call on the governments of those countries to come forward with proposals for improving their situation. In addition, a comprehensive effort is needed to combat the widespread racism experienced by Roma and so improve the children's prospects of securing equal rights in the future.

-----