



# Convention on the Rights of the Child

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## Committee on the Rights of the Child Ninety-eighth session

### Summary record of the 2848th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 13 January 2025, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Skelton

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*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

### **Consideration of reports of States parties**

*Sixth periodic report of Slovakia (CRC/C/SVK/6; CRC/C/SVK/Q/6; CRC/C/SVK/RQ/6)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Slovakia joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Slovakia**, introducing his country's sixth periodic report (CRC/C/SVK/6), said that his Government had enhanced multisectoral cooperation in the area of children's rights through the adoption of the Act on State Administration Bodies in the Field of Social Affairs, Family and Employment Services. Since 2017, 46 child protection coordinators nationwide had been working to eliminate systemic protection gaps and foster local coordination between the police, schools, municipalities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches and health facilities.
3. The Government promoted the involvement of children in regional policymaking and the assessment of measures aimed at upholding their rights under the Convention, for example, by encouraging children's activism and civic responsibility under the national "Childhood without Violence for All Children" strategy for the period 2023–2026, which promoted open dialogue to empower children to identify and report threats. Responding to an uptick in use of digital technologies in the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, in 2020, the Government had adopted the Child Protection in the Digital Space Strategy to combat threats such as cyberbullying, grooming and exposure to harmful content. The Strategy included preventive measures, intervention protocols and support for victims, as well as engagement in international networks to enhance digital safety.
4. In the framework of the European Child Guarantee of the European Union, the Government had designated the National Coordination Centre for Addressing Violence against Children as the national Child Guarantee Coordinator, making it responsible for overseeing an action plan of measures including the creation of school support teams for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, Roma children and children with disabilities, opportunities for school dropouts to finish their education and actions to address period poverty and improve access to healthcare and health awareness according to a participatory, regional approach.
5. The Government valued international cooperation through the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union and actively participated in international initiatives such as the Children of Prisoners Europe network, which sought to uphold the rights of children with imprisoned parents.
6. **Ms. Todorova** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that, while the existing laws on guardianship and family protection were to be acknowledged, there remained gaps in the child protection framework, including an absence of specific provisions on children's civil rights, the right to be heard and the consideration of their best interests in areas beyond family matters. She would welcome the delegation's comments in that regard, and would also be interested to learn more about the application of children's rights impact assessments in respect of government policies and programmes. She noted that the Government had discontinued its National Action Plan for Children in 2018 in favour of the incorporation of measures to uphold children's rights in its broader "Vision and Strategy" for the country's development up to 2030; she wondered whether that document had been adopted and would appreciate an explanation of its contents. It would also be useful to learn whether the Government planned to assign the overall coordination of child policies to the National Coordination Centre for Addressing Violence against Children. It appeared that data collection remained fragmented, making it unclear whether relevant information was available for coordinated policymaking. There were significant gaps in data concerning children in vulnerable situations.
7. While recent measures to promote access to justice were commendable, there continued to be shortcomings in the application of anti-discrimination law. Data from the State party's courts revealed issues with the interpretation of legal provisions on discrimination and a reluctance to fully address those issues, with their impact often being

downplayed. She therefore wished to know whether the Government had considered providing additional training for the judiciary in that area and would be grateful for information on access to justice for children in disadvantaged communities, as there appeared to be no specific procedures in place to inform children living in such communities of their rights. Additionally, while the existence of numerous human rights mechanisms was commendable, such mechanisms reportedly lacked resources and independence. In that regard, she wondered whether the Government planned to take steps to ensure that its human rights mechanisms were in line with the Paris Principles.

8. The Committee had received reports that cooperation between the Government and civil society had diminished and that civil society organizations were excluded from consultations on policy, and it was concerned about the chilling effect of statements by high-level government officials about halting support for progressive NGOs. She wondered whether such statements were representative of the position of the executive branch and would be grateful for an update on the status of the draft law on foreign agents. Furthermore, in the light of reports that Roma and LBGTI+ minors remained particularly vulnerable to discrimination, that anti-discrimination strategies were underfunded and that hate speech was on the rise in mainstream discourse, she wished to know what actions were being taken to address discrimination and hate speech and whether the Government had evaluated the impact of hateful discourse on children's mental health.

9. She would welcome an update on the legal provisions in force to ensure that children were heard in all judicial and administrative procedures affecting them. Regarding the family environment, she would be grateful for examples of successful measures that had been implemented to prevent family separation and information on any efforts undertaken to educate parents on their duty under article 5 of the Convention to provide appropriate guidance to their children. It would also be useful to receive an explanation of the differences between State and non-State care homes for children and information on the resources available to those homes, the ethnic diversity of their staff, the services they provided and the quality standards to which they adhered. She would also welcome clarification of the statement in the State party's replies to the Committee's list of issues ([CRC/C/SVK/RQ/6](#), para. 33) that truancy and lack of housing were the main reasons for the removal of children from their families.

10. Lastly, she would be grateful for details on measures implemented to address multidimensional child poverty, including among Roma communities, which allegedly faced residential segregation, inadequate housing and limited access to basic services. She would be interested to hear the delegation's comments on reports that individuals under temporary protection were ineligible for social security benefits, such as child allowances, which raised concerns about the situation of Ukrainian children attending Slovak schools, and she would appreciate information on the beneficiaries of social housing, specifically how many of them were families with children.

11. **The Chair** (Country Task Force) said that the Committee had previously urged the State party to prohibit the use of baby boxes and adopt alternative measures to ensure the safe and secure care of abandoned infants. Although the terminology used to refer to baby boxes had changed to "public incubators" or "rescue nests", such mechanisms appeared to function similarly; she would therefore be grateful for clarification of the measures in place to uphold children's right to identity and facilitate family reunification in the event of the use of baby boxes. She would also welcome clarification regarding the information kept on record in the event of anonymous hospital births and whether such information was accessible to the children concerned once they had reached adulthood; the policies in place regarding access by adopted children under the age of 18 years to information about their biological parents; and the data retention policies applied in sperm donor facilities.

12. She wished to know whether the action plan under the National Framework for the Protection of Children in the Digital Space had been updated, whether the Media Services Act provided adequate protection of children's rights to privacy and to access to information, including online, and, more broadly, whether the legislation on the digital environment was sufficient to protect children from harmful content. She would welcome details of any discussions that had taken place on what the Government might need to do to protect children

in the face of the rise of artificial intelligence and to ensure equal access to digital technologies.

13. She would be interested to learn more about how the authorities promoted children's participation in activism and whether children were permitted to take part in peaceful protests and, if so, whether policing techniques were adjusted to take into account the presence of children at such protests.

14. Despite some legislative advances in child protection, the level of violence used by parents against children remained high. It would be useful to know whether changes to legislation adopted in January 2016 had had an effect in that regard.

15. She would welcome details of efforts to apply a child-friendly, multisectoral approach and avoid revictimization when dealing with children who had been victims of sexual or other forms of abuse. In particular, she wished to know whether such children were subjected to a single forensic interview and, if so, whether the interview was recorded and could be used as evidence.

16. The delegation might comment on any use of new digital and artificial intelligence tools to detect sexual exploitation of children online, as well as on any programmes that were in place to inform parents and teachers about the risks children faced online and any channels that were available for children to report negative online experiences. She would welcome clarification of whether data collected on cases of sexual offences was disaggregated by age of the victim in order to identify the number of such cases that involved children.

17. She wished to know what was being done to prohibit forced marriage and change attitudes towards that practice.

18. The Committee had received reports of ill-treatment of, and excessive use of force against, Roma children by law enforcement officials. Had any such officials been prosecuted or convicted for such offences?

*The meeting was suspended at 3.50 p.m. and resumed at 4.15 p.m.*

19. **A representative of Slovakia** said that multisectoral and inter-agency cooperation was standard practice in all legislative and other efforts in the area of children's rights. In line with the spirit of the European Child Guarantee, the updated National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Violence had been prepared by a working group that included all relevant ministries, the General Public Prosecutor's Office, research institutes, NGOs and children. Since 2020, children had been included in the preparation of all strategies that affected them. Representatives of ministries met regularly with children in selected regions to hear their views, which were then used to inform the design of concrete measures.

20. A new action plan for the protection of children in the digital space had been drafted for the period 2024–2025. One of the key aims set out therein was for Slovakia to join the International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE), which worked with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) to identify and trace sexual images of children shared online. As part of its commitment as a member of Insafe, a network concerned with the positive, safe and effective use of online technologies, Slovakia planned to introduce digital literacy training for children.

21. **A representative of Slovakia** said that in 2023, 7,387 children had been living in settings known as professional substitute families, while 786 had been in foster care and 741 had been living with a guardian. Professional substitute families provided a family-like environment and were the preferred model of care for children separated from their biological family. Placements in Centres for Children and Families were decreasing in line with plans for deinstitutionalization. Specialists provided support to families with the aim of avoiding the need to remove children from their parents where possible. A voluntary scheme introduced to help families stay together had already been used by 4,400 clients. Private and State-run centres and institutions were subject to the same criteria in terms of staffing and funding levels.

22. With support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other international organizations, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family had submitted to the National Council (the parliament) a bill aimed at ensuring that all children with

disabilities and children from disadvantaged groups who had been separated from their families would be moved to professional substitute family settings.

23. **A representative of Slovakia** said that one aspect of the work of the Office of the Commissioner for Children, which had been set up in 2015, was to conduct independent surveys on topics related to the Convention. The number of violations of children's rights reported to the Office had increased in recent years; notably, more reports were now submitted by children themselves rather than by adults. Five publicly funded regional branches of the Office had been established to address regional specificities. The Office had made efforts to further develop the Child Rights Impact Assessment and the Child Rights Impact Evaluation, in cooperation with the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children.

24. In Slovakia, the tasks of the national preventive mechanism were distributed among three bodies, including the Office, which in 2024 had conducted 11 monitoring visits in that capacity. The Office was competent to intervene in legal proceedings concerning the placement of children in alternative care. It also issued recommendations and cooperated with other public institutions.

25. During the previous two years, the Office had stepped up its efforts to raise awareness of its work. It had set up the Children and Youth Parliament, which had already held five sessions and provided opportunities for children to express their views on alternative care and on issues of concern to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children and to children from socially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

26. **A representative of Slovakia** said that special prosecutors responsible for handling cases of crimes committed by or against children and youth had been introduced about 10 years previously, and they underwent continuous training and capacity-building. At least one, and as many as five, special prosecutors were assigned to each regional prosecutor's office of the General Prosecutor's Office. The police, too, had officers specializing in children's rights and the investigation of offences committed against children, including sexual abuse and forced marriage.

27. The Crime Victims Act addressed the issue of the best interests of the child in criminal proceedings. Law enforcement officers, prosecutors and the courts were under an obligation to take children's best interests into account at all times. In criminal proceedings involving child victims, special prosecutors were legally required to attend any interviews conducted with children, regardless of the seriousness of the offence. In 2024, court procedures had been updated so that interviews with child victims must be approved by a specialized court and conducted in such a way that the information gathered could be used as an evidence. To respect the rights of the defendant, a limited second interview might be approved, in which questions would be asked by the investigator, but not the defendant or the defence. Such interviews took place in a separate room – to avoid revictimization, the only persons present would usually be the child and the prosecutor or police investigator. A psychologist might also attend, or could listen to the interview from an adjacent room. Requests for second interviews were increasingly rare, and would be approved only when further questions were absolutely necessary. A child could request a second interview if he or she had omitted certain information in the first interview.

28. Slovakia also had law enforcement officers and prosecutors specializing in domestic violence. The General Prosecutor's Office was receiving an increasing number of complaints of domestic violence in the context of "adequate upbringing measures". Some parents had been prosecuted for using measures that virtually amounted to torture.

29. In terms of capacity-building to prevent child sexual abuse, special prosecutors had a remit to work with schools, which they visited several times a year in order to carry out preventive activities. Children were taught about the dangers of the online environment and good practices for staying safe online. Activities varied from school to school, with parents often participating in talks and awareness-raising initiatives.

30. The Government had taken steps to eliminate harmful online material. The police had introduced software for the detection of such content, which was already used in several European countries and had yielded good results. The General Prosecutor's report focused

on crimes against children, and the data collected on such crimes were continuously updated in order to build a clearer picture.

31. Every year, the Slovak authorities detected about 20 cases of forced marriage, which was dealt with under the offence of trafficking in persons. Efforts were made to raise public awareness of the offence, through both the media and direct engagement with health professionals, teachers and families, so as to encourage reporting of suspected cases.

32. Children who fell victim to offences or rights violations were themselves able to inform the law enforcement authorities. All offences reported by children were registered by the prosecutor's office, regardless of whether the child was alone or accompanied by his or her parents.

33. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the objectives of the new judicial map adopted in 2023 included improving the quality of the judiciary, increasing the size of the districts of individual courts and allowing for the specialization of judges through training in different areas, including children's rights. In that context, a number of changes had been introduced with a view to ensuring the best interests of the child in the handling of family law cases. For example, a time limit had been established for decision-making in child custody cases and special interview rooms had been created for judges to hold hearings with minors.

34. The Judicial Academy, attached to the Ministry of Justice, carried out various training activities for judges and had recently organized training on international human rights standards. The Ministry of Justice had taken steps to improve the participation of children in decision-making concerning their placement in a re-education centre or alternative care. The Ministry had also implemented the Action Plan for the Prevention of All Forms of Discrimination, under which different organizations had been tasked with supporting the protection of children's rights.

35. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, from 2019 to 2023, the Ministry of the Interior had participated in a national project to build child-friendly interview facilities. So far, 25 special interview rooms had been built to provide a family-like environment for children and other vulnerable persons, and a further 2 rooms had been built for interviewing child victims of trafficking.

36. The Crime Prevention Department of the Ministry of the Interior, the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, the National Coordination Centre for Addressing Violence against Children and other entities had jointly developed information materials on forced marriage in the Slovak, Romani and Ukrainian languages. In 2021 and 2022, the Ministry of the Interior and the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities had organized training at the municipal level to increase awareness of forced marriage so that cases could be quickly detected and assistance provided to victims. Slovakia had participated in international and European Union projects for the prevention of trafficking in persons and forced marriage, including a Czech project entitled "Comprehensive Approach to Preventing and Combating Child Trafficking".

37. Regarding reports of excessive use of force by law enforcement officials dealing with children, it should be noted that, in 2020, the Ministry of the Interior had introduced a policy of zero tolerance for police officers who abused their powers. In 2022, the Ministry had adopted a code of ethics for police officers and made clear that officers who breached the code would face disciplinary penalties. Police officers underwent regular training on human rights and the appropriate use of force. Moreover, the Office of the Inspection Service had a broad mandate to deliver preventive programmes and to independently investigate allegations of unlawful conduct by the police and prison officers. Such investigations were supervised by a prosecutor. In 2021, an investigation had been opened into a case that had occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which two minors from the Roma community had apparently been pursued into a forest and beaten by an unknown assailant, alleged to be a member of the police force. However, no formal complaint had been lodged and the investigators had been unable to identify the perpetrator.

38. Regarding the matter of pressure on NGOs, it should be noted that, following the submission of a legislative proposal by members of the National Council, the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development had been authorized to draft a bill on the position and

independence of NGOs. The bill would meet all international requirements, including in respect of combating money-laundering. The Plenipotentiary had already held discussions on the bill with State authorities and NGOs, and a committee of experts had been set up to work on the draft.

39. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the use of baby boxes was intended to reduce the risk of death among abandoned newborns. In cases of anonymous birth, a report identifying the gender of the baby was drawn up on the day of the mother's discharge from hospital. Infants placed in baby boxes received the necessary healthcare, and the treating paediatrician or neonatologist was required to record all relevant information, including the approximate date of birth, within three days of the child's being found. When registering the child, it was necessary to note the approximate date of birth or, failing that, the last day of the month when the child was found. In 2023, there had been 49 anonymous births and 7 infants had been placed in baby boxes, while in 2024 there had been 62 anonymous births and 10 infants placed in baby boxes.

40. In 2022, the Ministry of Health had updated its guidance on the use of baby boxes, laying down the applicable standards for the maintenance of baby boxes and the healthcare of newborns placed in them. For example, a video camera must be placed in the baby box and the video monitored in a room with a doctor present. Regular audits, including unannounced audits, were conducted to ensure that health workers responsible for baby boxes were familiar with the standards and duly followed the established procedures.

41. **A representative of Slovakia** said that mothers who gave birth anonymously had a period of two months in which they could request the disclosure of their name, and the baby could not be adopted within that period. Any woman who subsequently wished to be recognized as the mother of a child placed in a baby box could apply to the courts to prove her motherhood, and might undergo a DNA test to that end.

42. **Ms. Todorova** said that she would appreciate the State party's comments on the apparent contradiction in its claims to be pursuing a deinstitutionalization strategy at a time when the number of children's homes in the country and the number of children in institutional care were increasing. She wondered whether the delegation would agree that poverty and disability were the main reasons that led children to be separated from their biological family and placed in homes. She wished to know how often the Commissioner for Children visited children's homes; what the main issues identified during such visits had been; and which organizations managed the homes that were not State-run. It would also be interesting to know whether the Government sought cooperation with the private sector on children's rights' issues and whether business enterprises had monitoring mechanisms in place to measure the impact of their activities on those rights and ensure that they were respected in different business activities.

43. **Mr. Gudbrandsson**, commending government efforts to protect children from undergoing repetitive interviews in legal proceedings and to provide child-friendly facilities, said that he would appreciate confirmation that, after giving their initial statement and, if necessary, being cross-examined at the pretrial stage, child witnesses were not normally required to appear in trial proceedings. Assurances that child protection proceedings and child medical and mental health assessments were conducted in similar child-friendly facilities and subject to similar restrictions on repetitive interviewing would be helpful. If that was not the case, what was being done to address the problem? He suggested that the State party might consider setting up multi-agency, child-friendly centres, similar to those established in Hungary, Poland and Slovenia.

44. **Mr. Van Keirsbilck** said that he would like to know whether the Commissioner for Children had a mandate to visit any kind of place in which children might be deprived of liberty, including police stations, psychiatric institutions and migrant reception centres; what training the officers who conducted those visits received; what kind of complaints had been raised; and how they were addressed. Regarding baby boxes, he wondered what was being done to address the root causes of abandonment at birth and prevent mothers from seeing it as the only solution.

45. **Ms. Al Barwani** (Country Task Force) said that, for the Committee to be able to assess the country's progress effectively, it required comprehensive, disaggregated data on

the situation of children with disabilities, as requested in its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/SVK/CO/3-5, para. 10) and in the list of issues in relation to the State party's sixth periodic report (CRC/C/SVK/Q/6, para. 18). Information on the action taken to ensure that children with disabilities had equal access to quality education without discrimination on the basis of ability, as provided for in applicable legislation, would be helpful. Given that schools for children with special needs appeared still to be operating, information about the steps being taken to phase out segregated schools and promote inclusive education would likewise be appreciated. The delegation might also comment on the apparent contradiction between the provision for day-care funding for children under the age of 3 years old included in the national early intervention strategy and the legislation that allowed for children under the age of 6 to be placed in residential care. Details of any government plans to expedite the deinstitutionalization of children with disabilities of all ages would be welcomed.

46. She was concerned that institutional care, including professional substitute families, seemed still to be seen as a viable solution. Furthermore, owing to a lack of government support and a shortage of specialized personnel, NGOs appeared to provide a substantial proportion of that care. Information about any measures in place to increase financial, technical and social support for the families of children with disabilities with a view to ensuring their social inclusion and encouraging families to care for their children within the home environment would therefore be helpful, as would details of the resources allocated to implementation of the National Programme for the Development of Living Conditions of People with Disabilities.

47. She would like to know what the Government was doing to address the entrenched discrimination, social and economic inequalities, residential segregation and systemic exclusion and poverty faced by Roma children. Despite efforts by the Ministry of Education to promote the inclusion of marginalized groups, the number of children enrolled in "special" schools exclusively for Roma children remained disproportionately high and Roma children who did not attend such schools tended to be placed in segregated classes in mainstream schools. It would be useful to learn whether those children were still receiving a differentiated, lower-quality education and, if so, what was being done to change the status quo. She would also like to hear about any efforts to address criticisms to the effect that the Roma desegregation guidance manual published in April 2022 lacked clarity and practical guidance, and to counter the persistent learning deficit affecting marginalized groups, which had been exacerbated by a lack of Internet access, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

48. She would appreciate an update on efforts to address bullying in school settings, to understand the root causes of violence among students, which was reported to have included the use of explosive devices in schools, and to ensure that students were duly protected. Details of efforts to educate the public about the benefits of early childhood education for children's overall development and future academic success would likewise be helpful, given that most Slovak children did not benefit from preschool education, seemingly owing to a lack of places and high fees. Lastly, she would like to hear about any steps being taken to ensure that the rights of migrant, refugee and other vulnerable children, including their right of access to compulsory education until reaching the age of 16 years, were upheld.

49. **The Chair** said that, in view of the suspension of the climate bill and the absence of a legislative framework, she wondered how the State party's 2050 target for carbon neutrality and its commitments under the European Union national energy and climate plans could be met. She would also like information about any national policies and programmes to address climate change and disaster risk management and any plans to increase climate change and natural disaster awareness and preparedness among children by giving the topics greater prominence in school curricula.

50. **Ms. Kiladze** (Country Task Force), referring to reports of discrimination against Roma women and other vulnerable persons in healthcare facilities, said that information about any monitoring mechanisms in place to protect the rights of patients in State-run and private facilities would be helpful. She would also like details of any action under way to close the legal lacunae that might deny children the right to be accompanied by a parent or other caregiver when hospitalized; counter the increase in childhood obesity and promote healthy lifestyles; and ensure the availability of sufficient appropriately trained psychologists



to address the mental health challenges faced by children. Additionally, she would like to know whether the State party had a comprehensive policy on adolescent reproductive health; whether the core school curriculum covered early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections; and what was being done to address substance abuse among young people.

51. She invited the delegation to comment on reports that unaccompanied migrant and refugee children were sometimes placed in prison-like facilities without access to essential services despite a legal prohibition on their detention. She would like to hear more about the legal requirement for unaccompanied minors to be assigned a court-appointed guardian and how the system worked in practice, in view of reports that the requirement might not be entirely respected. She would particularly appreciate the delegation's comments on the situation of Ukrainian minors who travelled to Slovakia to pursue a university education; it appeared that the agencies their parents paid to ensure due care might not be fulfilling their legal obligations effectively. She would also like to know more about age assessment procedures, including whether there was a presumption of childhood if a young person refused to undergo a medical examination. Additionally, she wished to know whether national legislation on statelessness determination procedures reflected the obligations established in the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and whether children granted asylum on humanitarian grounds were entitled to family reunification.

52. She further enquired whether free legal assistance was available for minors in all stages of criminal proceedings following the adoption of the new judicial map for the administration of juvenile justice in 2023; whether psychosocial support services were available in re-education centres for minors; how many re-education centres were operating nationwide and how many children they could accommodate; to what extent mediation, probation, community service and other non-custodial penalties for children in conflict with the law were used; what was being done to ensure that minors were detained as a last resort only; and, if minors were detained, whether they were separated from adults and had access to all appropriate services. Lastly, she would like to know the status of proposed amendments to the Criminal Code that would recognize the involvement of children in armed conflict as a criminal offence.

*The meeting rose at 6 p.m.*