



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2849th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 14 January 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Skelton

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Sixth periodic report of Slovakia (continued) (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. **The Chair** invited the delegation to reply to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting.
3. **A representative of Slovakia** said that a law adopted in 2015 regulated the rights of the child in civil proceedings, including the right to be heard. The same law also established the obligations of judges to give consideration to children's opinions.
4. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, although the number of children living in Centres for Children and Families had risen in 2019 and 2020, it had fallen gradually but continuously every year since 2020. As of December 2024, around 3,100 children had been living in institutional care. A number of those children had since been placed with foster families. The Government had developed a strategy for deinstitutionalizing care and efforts would continue to be made to deinstitutionalize children living in Centres for Children and Families.
5. Under the Family Act, a family's housing situation or financial circumstances could not be invoked as grounds for placing a child in institutional care. Children and families were assessed to determine the level of risk that children faced. Once assessments had been carried out, proposals relating to the care of the child concerned were submitted to the courts.
6. **A representative of Slovakia** said that steps had been taken to strengthen child-friendly justice by enhancing cooperation between the various actors involved in providing support to children. Efforts had also been made to make the justice system more understandable for children, especially those who were at risk of being subjected to violence or threats. The Government had begun implementing the Barnahus model in 2024 to ensure that children who had witnessed or experienced acts of violence received the support that they needed from multidisciplinary teams of experts.
7. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the Office of the Commissioner for Children was an independent entity established in 2015 that had begun operating in 2016. The Commissioner was elected on the basis of recommendations made by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which ensured that he or she was independent and had sufficient expert knowledge of the subject area. The Commissioner was authorized to conduct interviews with children in remand centres and other institutional facilities without the presence of the authorities. However, he or she was required to inform the prosecution service before interviewing children in custody.
8. The Office of the Commissioner submitted annual reports to the parliament setting out recommendations for overcoming shortcomings in the child protection system. It could also submit extraordinary reports, if the need arose. The recommendations most frequently made by the Office related to the training of staff in Centres for Children and Families and the allocation of funding to centres to enable them to employ healthcare staff and psychologists with the relevant expertise. Other recommendations related to the accessibility of centres, the education of children and the development of methodologies for working with children facing multiple disadvantages. Since 2020, the Office had conducted 68 visits to institutional centres to monitor the extent to which children's rights were respected.
9. In July 2023, Slovakia had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and had established a national mechanism for the prevention of torture. In November 2023, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment had visited Slovakia. On the basis of the Subcommittee's recommendations, the Government had set up a multidisciplinary team responsible for conducting monitoring visits to places of deprivation of liberty. The visiting team was currently composed of a lawyer, a psychologist and two social workers and was authorized to consult children's

medical records. Other experts were sometimes invited to participate in visits. The mechanism had conducted 11 monitoring visits since October 2023 and would submit its findings to the Ombudsman, who would draft a report for the Subcommittee.

10. **Mr. Van Keirsbilck** said that he would welcome further clarification of the circumstances in which the Commissioner for Children was required to inform the prosecution service if he or she wished to conduct an interview with a child in custody.

11. **Ms. Todorova** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that it would be useful to have the full text of the relevant provision of the law adopted in 2015 that established the right of children to be heard in civil proceedings.

12. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the Commissioner for Children was required to inform the prosecution service if he or she wished to conduct an interview with a child in custody in order to mitigate the risk of influencing witnesses or other persons participating in proceedings.

13. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the aforementioned law adopted in 2015 established that minors who were able to express their own opinion had a right to be heard by judges and to have those opinions considered in accordance with their age and capacity. Under the Family Act, minors had the right to express their opinions on any matters affecting them in decision-making processes. The consideration given to those opinions depended on the age and capacities of the children expressing them.

14. **Ms. Todorova** said that she would welcome information on the procedure used by judges to determine whether children had sufficient capacity to express their views in civil proceedings.

15. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the procedure depended on the nature of the proceedings. In family law proceedings, judges used reports drawn up by psychologists and other experts to determine whether children had the capacity to express their views.

16. **A representative of Slovakia** said that efforts were made to ensure that adequate standards of perinatal care were respected in hospitals and that breastfeeding and early bonding between infants and parents were promoted. In accordance with the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative, audits of the care provided to newborns in hospitals were conducted. Once a year, the Ministry of Health met with organizations representing persons with disabilities with a view to gathering their suggestions for resolving problems relating to the payment of medical fees.

17. Under the National Mental Health Programme, steps were being taken to promote the health and well-being of families with young children. In 2023 and 2024, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Ministry of Health had implemented an initiative to support the early development of children, including refugee children from Ukraine. Surveys in the Ukrainian language had been distributed to paediatricians and guidelines on screening methods in that language had been implemented.

18. Surveys were conducted and documentation was being developed to improve early care for children. Plans were in place to create a model for the provision of complex care to young children. The model would be based on the functional needs of children as defined in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health of the World Health Organization.

19. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the Government had adopted a strategy for promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities in the education system and a programme for promoting inclusive education that would be implemented until 2030. The main goal of the programme was to reduce the gaps between the education provided in different schools and to make schools more inclusive so that children with disabilities would find it easier to join the labour market when they left school. Steps would be taken to eliminate barriers in schools, train teachers in disability issues and combat stigmatization based on disability. An indicator had been developed to assess the expansion of inclusive education.

20. As part of the second action plan under the aforementioned strategy for promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities, counselling services would be strengthened; school

accessibility would gradually be improved for children with disabilities by eliminating barriers in the school environment; and teacher training courses and undergraduate study programmes in inclusive education would be modified to improve inclusive education skills, including the use of alternative forms of communication. In addition to educating children with disabilities inclusively in a mainstream environment, it would remain possible to educate such children at specialized schools subject to parental consent. The Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth had based its work in the area of inclusive education on data related to children with disabilities in Slovakia that had been provided by the Centre for Scientific and Technical Information and was disaggregated by type of school, school year and other categories.

21. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, in addition to active deinstitutionalization efforts, a strategy had been developed to better manage the pathway of children with disabilities through available habilitation and rehabilitation systems. The National Strategy for the Development of Coordinated Early Intervention and Early Care Services 2022–2030, which had its basis in the Social Services Act, was intended to safeguard the development of children under 7 years of age who were in need of support and prevent them from being socially excluded. Under the Social Services Act, paid caregivers could benefit from respite care for a maximum of 30 days per calendar year.

22. Slovakia had recently adopted a new form of medical assessment for determining the amount in benefits to be awarded to persons with serious disabilities. The assessment was based on the methodology of the Disability Assessment Schedule of the World Health Organization and took into consideration the needs of both adults and children with disabilities. The Government would soon introduce an independent assessment for children with disabilities under the benefits system. Under a reform of social services funding that would soon be implemented, individuals would receive benefits earmarked for care services.

23. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, with a view to promoting inclusion and equal treatment, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family intended to submit a legislative amendment under which children with disabilities at Centres for Children and Families would no longer be placed in special groups. The Government had previously conducted a project with UNICEF and the European Commission with a view to developing a model system for monitoring and assessing the quality of social and legal care provided to children with disabilities. It was currently developing a system that would enable it to use the indicators from that project to better identify targeted measures to improve such care, one of which was deinstitutionalization.

24. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth was committed to ensuring that all children received the same education irrespective of their race, nationality, background and other characteristics. In January 2024, it had adopted a strategy for the implementation of a monitoring system for identifying and preventing segregation of children in schools. In the first report on the findings of that system, which had been published in October 2024, the segregation of children had been identified at 23 per cent of primary schools, the majority of which were attended by students from marginalized Roma settlements. Although the report had focused on pupils in marginalized Roma settlements, where the problem was most severe, it had been found that additional groups had been subjected to segregation. The Ministry planned to implement the monitoring system in higher education institutions and to publish annual reports on the extent of segregation at all educational levels by 2025. In response to action taken against Slovakia by the European Commission concerning the segregation of Roma children in violation of Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, monitoring focused on investigating the broader context in which segregation was taking place in addition to identifying the schools involved.

25. Several national projects had been developed with a view to addressing the problem of indirect discrimination against Roma children. Under one such project, which had been developed in response to disproportionate placement of Roma children in special schools or classes for children with intellectual disabilities, a system of adaptation classes would be operated temporarily to help pupils transition from special schools to mainstream schools. Another project, which had been approved in April 2024, was aimed at ensuring equal

opportunities for all by combating racial discrimination against and segregation of Roma children in particular and improving their access to all levels of education and educational attainment. Under yet another project, which had been developed specifically in response to the action taken against Slovakia by the European Commission, desegregation efforts would be carried out at schools in 15 specially selected locations with the help of an expert team. It was intended that the project would result in the publication of guidance on how to eliminate segregation in schools. Another project, conducted jointly by the Ministry and the Council of Europe, with funding from the European Commission and the involvement of the Erasmus programme, was focused on developing materials for training teachers to educate Roma children in the Romani language. A definition of segregation had been provided under amendments to the Education Act in 2024, making the problem simpler to address. In November 2024 the Ministry had established a set of binding standards to help schools to eliminate segregation and ensure that all students enjoyed fair educational opportunities.

26. Under legislative amendments adopted in 2022, children who had not achieved results in their primary education that would enable them to progress to secondary education or employment, which had happened in the case of many Roma children who had attended special schools, were permitted under certain conditions to study for an additional, ninth, year. A total of 342 children had obtained a lower-level secondary education under that scheme, after which it had been possible for them either to continue their education in secondary schools or to enter employment. Local authorities assisted children who had not attended a mainstream school for the standard amount of time in finding employment opportunities.

27. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the success of the Digital Pupil project, under which families had been able to obtain financial assistance to purchase devices such as computers and tablets to assist their children with their studies, had revealed the nature of the support needed by families and demonstrated the importance of providing it.

28. The Government had monitored the commission of acts of violence against children and had carried out research on that subject on an annual basis since 2020, taking into account the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Such research focused on the online environment and not on individual schools. The Government was aware of the importance of raising awareness about bullying at schools among teachers and other adults and providing them with relevant guidance for addressing it, and sought out appropriate means of doing so as part of the national strategy “Childhood without Violence for All Children”. As research had shown that more than one third of children did not talk about their experiences of bullying, efforts were being made under the Strategy to support cooperation between parents and schools in that area, in addition to using peer-based approaches and supporting schools in establishing rules for combating bullying in cooperation with students.

29. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth was finalizing updated guidelines for addressing bullying at school that were intended to improve methods for intervening in such cases and dealing with the individuals involved. The Ministry also regularly reported on the number of bullying complaints registered in secondary schools and had developed guidelines for improving children’s social and emotional education and resilience, coping skills and mental health and encouraging families to cooperate with schools in such efforts. Other guidelines, aimed at fostering a safer school environment and improving relations between children, would be disseminated in Slovak, Hungarian and Ukrainian. Lastly, the Ministry was planning to hold specialized training at the National Institute of Education and Youth aimed at creating a safer school environment, improving digital literacy and safety and boosting the mental health and resilience of teachers.

The meeting was suspended at 11.25 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.

30. **A representative of Slovakia** said that complaints relating to the provision of healthcare services could be filed with the provider concerned, the Central Office of Healthcare or the courts directly; there was a civil society organization that represented the interests of patients.

31. Efforts were under way to increase staffing levels in paediatric psychiatry, including through a group of government experts on mental health tasked with supporting the

continuity of psychiatric care through the proposal of new legislation. In addition, the Government had adopted a national programme and action plan on mental health in August 2024, which envisaged the establishment of mechanisms to support mental health at the individual and community levels by 2030. Areas of focus included quality of services, inclusion, destigmatization and training for professionals.

32. All children were entitled to the same healthcare services as the rest of the population, including preventive check-ups under the public health insurance scheme, irrespective of their ethnicity, origin and nationality. Regional offices of the national healthcare system had run hundreds of activities in 2023 on the prevention of smoking and alcohol and substance abuse by children.

33. **A representative of Slovakia** said that healthy lifestyle choices were a component of the sports curriculum. To avoid forcing children to take part in sports, efforts were being made, with input from psychologists, to find alternative ways of getting children interested in physical activity, regardless of their physical ability. The “Trainers at School” programme, launched in 2021 to improve the physical skills of children, had since been expanded to nearly 300 kindergartens and primary schools attended by 25,000 children. Training in physical activity was also being provided to educators to boost their motivation and enhance their skills, and the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth was developing a national strategy to promote children’s physical activity in school.

34. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, in 2021, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family had set up a body to support mental health services at the community level for persons who had been diagnosed with a mental condition or who were seeking mental health support. Helplines had also been set up to provide free counselling.

35. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, in accordance with family law and procedural rules, unaccompanied minors, irrespective of their country of origin or reason for entering the country, were immediately referred to social and legal protection bodies and were assigned a guardian by the courts. They were placed in a Centre for Children and Families, where steps were taken to prevent or minimize their risk of flight, and were granted a 60-day permit, with the possibility of renewal.

36. Age-determination procedures could be initiated at any stage of migration proceedings, although in most cases they took place prior to a decision on the asylum claim. The process began with non-medical methods, including the assessment of the applicant’s documents and an interview, to be supplemented where necessary with an X-ray of the wrist or wisdom teeth. Where doubts as to the applicant’s age persisted, the migration authorities could order a medical examination; the applicant was informed of the consequences of refusing to undergo the examination, namely that he or she would be considered to be an adult. Where age still could not be determined, the applicant was considered to be a minor. Persons had to have been granted asylum before they could apply for family reunification, except where, in keeping with the Dublin III Regulation and the principle of the best interests of the child, the applicant was an unaccompanied minor seeking to join relatives already in Slovakia.

37. Where the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police determined that detention was unavoidable, unaccompanied minors and families with children were held in a special facility, usually for no more than two to three months. Various services were available at the facility, including meals, leisure activities, Slovak language classes and healthcare; children attended school nearby. Slovakia was preparing amendments and new legislation, including regarding the creation of multidisciplinary teams to conduct age assessments, to ensure that its national law was in line with the European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum due to come into effect in 2026. Regarding the penalties for trafficking in persons, according to an analysis conducted by the Ministry of the Interior, which was available in Slovak on the Ministry’s website, most persons accused of trafficking offences received lenient sentences.

38. **Ms. Todorova** said that she would like to know how many children were in the criminal justice system and whether steps had been taken to provide judges with training on juvenile justice. She wondered who was responsible for running the re-education centres that housed child offenders, under what circumstances judges decided to place child offenders in such centres instead of imposing other penalties and in what proportion of cases they did so.

Information on the number of children who had been arrested and held in pretrial detention would be welcome. She would be grateful for an update on any developments in the discussions concerning incarcerated mothers and their children and for information on the State party's policies on abortion access for pregnant minors.

39. **Ms. Kiladze** (Country Task Force) said that she would appreciate further information on the functioning of the mental health body established in 2021 and the free counselling helplines available. The delegation might clarify whether multidisciplinary teams tasked with assessing the age of unaccompanied migrant children had already been set up and begun operating.

40. **Ms. Al Barwani** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know what the State party hoped to achieve through its programme for inclusive education and whether one of the targets was to ensure that every school provided such an education. She wondered whether renovations to guarantee the accessibility of school buildings had begun and whether funding for such projects would be made available to educational establishments across the country, including those in remote communities and areas with large minority populations. It would be useful to know whether refugee and asylum-seeking children, including those who were unaccompanied, were entitled to free preschool education. She would also be grateful for more information on the forms of support offered through the respite care service for the families of children with disabilities.

41. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi**, recalling the Committee's position that detaining migrant children on the grounds of their or their family's migration status was unacceptable, said that she would welcome clarification of whether the detention centres that housed migrant children for up to six months were open or closed facilities.

42. **Mr. Van Keirsbilck** said that he wished to know how many migrant children had been held in detention facilities in recent years and whether they had access to complaint mechanisms or legal remedies to challenge their detention. Information on the number of Ukrainian children hosted by the State party would be welcome, as would statistics on the proportion of such children who were classed as unaccompanied. It would be helpful to know whether the State party had received any institutionalized Ukrainian children and, if so, whether those children had been placed in Slovak institutions. In view of the large number of Ukrainian children returning to their country, he would appreciate details of any policies in place to handle that situation.

43. It would be useful to learn what steps the State party took to ensure that adults accompanying migrant children who were not related to them would be suitable and safe caregivers. The delegation might describe how the State party selected the guardians assigned to unaccompanied minors. What procedures were in place to ensure that they had the requisite qualifications? How was their work supervised?

44. **Ms. Aho** said that she would appreciate information on the number of children who were currently living with foster families, the length of time it took to place children with such families and the procedures in place to assess families' suitability for fostering.

45. Details of any mechanisms established to ensure the early detection of disability would be welcome, as would information on any specific programmes on children with disabilities. She wished to know what percentage of Slovak children were living with a disability and how many of those children were affected by severe disability. It would be useful to hear more about the bill, which she understood would be presented to the Government the following day, concerning persons with severe disabilities and to learn whether such persons had access to community-based care.

46. **A representative of Slovakia** said that family law was one of the matters addressed in the judicial road map established in 2023. A specific interviewing room for children and other vulnerable victims had been created as part of the refurbishment of the court of appeal in Trnava. The Judicial Academy of the Ministry of Justice provided ongoing training to judges, prosecutors and other justice officials on topics such as family law and discrimination.

47. **A representative of Slovakia** said that children were considered highly vulnerable persons and were thus entitled to free legal assistance and support through the Legal Aid

Centre. Child victims of crime had access to a comprehensive range of services, including counselling and social support. National law established that all minors who had been accused of a crime must receive legal assistance and that a parent or legal guardian must be present during the proceedings. In certain cases, prosecutors could decide to end the proceedings before they reached the courts. They did so on the condition that the child concerned would comply with certain orders, such as instructions to regularly attend school or psychological counselling sessions. In cases that were heard by the courts, alternatives to detention could be used under certain circumstances. Children who received custodial sentences were not detained in the same facilities as adults. Those between 12 and 14 years who committed serious crimes were sentenced in civil proceedings and held in establishments that sought to re-educate them, identify the reasons behind their behaviour and restore their ties with society.

48. **A representative of Slovakia** said that there were currently 805 foster families looking after more than 1,400 children. While responsibility for supervising such families lay primarily with the relevant regional teams, the courts could intervene where necessary. In 2023, the Centres for Children and Families had hosted 176 unaccompanied migrant children. They had received a total of 256 such children from Ukraine since the outbreak of the conflict in that country in 2022. Almost all the Ukrainian children had stayed in the Centres for a short period and had since been reunited with their families.

49. **A representative of Slovakia** said that respite care could be provided from the child's home, at a day centre or from inpatient facilities. Provisions amending the procedure for assessing disability were currently being incorporated into national law. Under that procedure, individuals were required to submit an application for support, following which the background, living situation and degree of disability of the individual concerned would be assessed.

50. His Government had been assisting Ukrainian refugees since the beginning of the conflict and was grateful for the support received from UNICEF in that regard. In 2024, more than 6,100 Ukrainian children had benefited from a scheme granting them an allowance equivalent to the daily living wage, in addition to clothing and one hot meal per day. That same year, allowances for school meals and educational material had been received by 6,938 and 266 Ukrainian children, respectively. Almost 400 child refugees had applied for a humanitarian grant for persons with severe disabilities, and a housing allowance was currently being paid to 120 individuals receiving temporary protection. A law on the continuation of support for Ukrainian refugees was due to be passed the following day.

51. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the re-education centres had a total capacity of 516 places. Children were placed in such centres by order of the courts or at the request of their legal representative. Two centres had been closed after failing to meet the requisite standards, and there was a clear need to improve cooperation and coordination among staff. An interministerial task force had been set up to address that situation and improve the service provided by staff, with €1.5 million being earmarked for that purpose. Children housed in the centres received support from psychotherapists and took part in other activities recommended by the Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology. They also had the opportunity to receive an education outside the centres.

52. Pursuant to the School Act, all refugee and asylum-seeking children, including those who were unaccompanied, had to attend school once they reached the age of compulsory education. Children born to foreign parents received additional language support, and teachers who worked with them were provided with various forms of additional training.

53. In 2023, some 10,600 of the 11,000 Ukrainian children who had arrived in Slovakia had been granted permission to remain in the country. The requirement for Ukrainian children in Slovakia to enrol in Slovak schools had been introduced on 1 January 2025. Any incidences of children failing to attend were to be reported by the school concerned. Special classes had been set up in primary schools to help Ukrainian children adapt before joining regular classes. The Government sought to provide Ukrainian children with an education that was as equal as possible to that received by their Slovak peers and in keeping with the one they would have been offered in their home country.

54. The Government's aim was for all Slovak schools to offer an inclusive education and for inclusive schools to become the preferred choice of parents considering where to educate their children. Schools were able to set up teams to support inclusive activities, and efforts were being made to enhance the assistance available to children. Funding for such initiatives was provided through the State budget, the Recovery and Resilience Plan and other sources.

55. **Ms. Todorova** said that she wished to commend the State party for its efforts to implement the Convention and the Optional Protocols thereto. She hoped that the Committee's concluding observations would be taken seriously by the Slovak authorities and would be disseminated and put into practice in cooperation with civil society and children themselves.

56. **A representative of Slovakia** said that he would like to thank the Committee for the open and constructive dialogue, which had helped the delegation to identify the challenges to be tackled. It would endeavour to submit any outstanding replies within 48 hours. He was grateful to civil society and national and international NGOs for their contribution to the process. His Government was committed to adopting all legislative and non-legislative measures necessary to accelerate the deinstitutionalization of care and to enhancing support aimed at facilitating the reunification of children in care with their families.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.