



# International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

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## Human Rights Committee

### **Fifth periodic report submitted by Slovakia under article 40 of the Covenant, due in 2024\*** \*\*, \*\*\*

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\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

\*\* The present document was submitted pursuant to the simplified reporting procedure. It contains the responses of the State Party to the Committee's list of issues prior to reporting (CCPR/C/SVK/QPR/5).

\*\*\* The annex to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



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## List of Abbreviations

ADA	Act No. 365/2004 Coll. on equal treatment in certain areas and on protection against discrimination and on amendments of certain acts (Anti-Discrimination Act), as amended
APF	Academy of the Police Force in Bratislava
Building Act	Act No. 50/1976 Coll. on spatial planning and building regulations (Building Act), as amended
CMC	Coordination and Methodology Centre for Violence Prevention
Competence Act	Act No. 575/2001 Coll. on the Organisation of Government Activities and the Organisation of the Central State Administration, as amended, and amending certain acts
Contingency Plan	Contingency Plan of the Slovak Republic for addressing the emergency situation in connection with the mass influx of Ukrainian residents to the territory of the Slovak Republic caused by the escalation of the armed conflict in Ukraine for the period October 2022 to March 2023
Code of Criminal Procedure	Act No. 301/2005 Coll. Code of Criminal Procedure, as amended
Committee	United Nations Human Rights Committee
Criminal Act	Act No. 300/2005 Coll. the Criminal Act, as amended
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
Education Act	Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on upbringing and education (the Education Act) and on amendments to certain acts, as amended
Equality Strategy	Strategy of Equality between Women and Men and Equal Opportunities for 2021–2027
EU	European Union
Family Act	Act No. 36/2005 Coll. on the Family and on amendments to certain acts, as amended
GEC	Gender Equality Committee of the Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality
GO SR	Government Office of the Slovak Republic
GP SR	Office of the General Prosecutor of the Slovak Republic
GPS	Programme Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic 2023–2027 “Better, more peaceful and safer living”
HPAs	Health promotion assistants in hospitals
HRGC	Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality

ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IHRA	International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
Inclusion Strategy	Strategy for an Inclusive Approach in Education and Upbringing until 2030
ISO	Inspection Service Office
JA SR	Judicial Academy of the Slovak Republic
LCOS	local civic order services
LFRI	Labour and Family Research Institute
list of issues	list of issues for the preparation of the fifth periodic report of the Slovak Republic on the implementation of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
MO MoI SR	Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic
MoC SR	Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic
MoE SR	Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic
MoH SR	Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic
MoI SR	Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic
MoJ SR	Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic
MoLSAF SR	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic
MoT SR	Ministry of Transport of the Slovak Republic
MRC	marginalized Roma communities
Name and Surname Act	Act No. 300/1993 Coll. on the Name and Surname, as amended
National Strategy	National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Violence: Childhood without Violence for All Children (2023–2029)
National Strategy AP	Action Plan based on the National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Violence: Childhood without Violence for All Children (2023–2026)
NC SR	National Council of the Slovak Republic
NCA	National Crime Agency of the Presidium of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic
NCC	National Coordination Centre for Solving Issues related to Violence against Children
NIEY	National Institute of Education and Youth
NP COVID MRC	National Project named “Supporting the activities aimed at addressing adverse situations related to COVID-19”
NPM	National Prevention Mechanism
NRFC	non-refundable financial contribution

ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OPGRC	Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Roma Communities
PA	priority axis
Personal Identification Number Act	Act No. 301/1995 Coll. on the Personal Identification Number, as amended
PF SR	Police Force of the Slovak Republic
PJGC	Prison and Justice Guard Corps
PPF SR	Presidium of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic
PGRC	Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities
Religious Freedom Act	Act No. 308/1991 Coll. on the Freedom of Religious Belief and the Status of Churches and Religious Societies, as amended
Recovery and Resilience	Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic Plan
Research Institute	Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology
Security Council SR	Security Council of the Slovak Republic
SIR	special interview rooms
Slovak Constitution	Constitution of the Slovak Republic
Slovak Government	Government of the Slovak Republic
SNCHR	Slovak National Centre for Human Rights
SR	Slovak Republic
Strategy 2030	Strategy of Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030
Strategy 2030 APs	Action Plans to the Strategy of Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030 for 2022–2024
UN	United Nations Organisation
Act No. 40/2024	Act No. 40/2024 Coll. amending the Act No. 300/2005 Coll. the Criminal Act, as amended, and amending certain acts
Act No. 201/2022	Act No. 201/2022 Coll. on Construction
Act No. 274/2017	Act No. 274/2017 Coll. on the Victims of Crime and on amendments to certain acts
Act No. 312/2020	Act No. 312/2020 Coll. on the Execution of Decisions on the Seizure of Property and the Administration of Seized Property and on amendments to certain acts
Act No. 316/2016	Act No. 316/2016 Coll. on the Recognition and Enforcement of Property Judgements Rendered

	in Criminal Proceedings in the European Union and on amendments to certain acts, as amended
Act No. 321/2018	Act No. 321/2018 Coll. amending the Act No. 550/2003 Coll. on Probation and Mediation Officers and on amendments to certain acts, as amended, and amending certain acts
Act No. 404/2011	Act No. 404/2011 Coll. on the Residence of Foreigners and on amendments to certain acts, as amended
Act No. 480/2002	Act No. 480/2002 Coll. on Asylum and on amendments to certain acts, as amended
Act No. 576/2004	Act No. 576/2004 Coll. on Health Care, Services Related to the Provision of Health Care and on amendments to certain acts
Act No. 581/2004	Act No. 581/2004 Coll. on Health Insurance Companies, Healthcare Supervision and on amendments to certain acts, as amended

1. The present document contains the replies of the Slovak Republic to the list of issues (CCPR/C/SVK/QPR/5) adopted by the Committee at its 139th session, which was held from 9 October to 3 November 2023. The Committee's concluding recommendations on the Fourth Periodic Report of the Slovak Republic on the Implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR/C/SVK/CO/4) were adopted at its 3329th session held on 31 October 2016.

## **Replies to the list of issues prior to reporting (CCPR/C/SVK/QPR/5)**

### **A. General information on the national human rights situation, including new measures and developments in relation to the implementation of the ICCPR**

#### **Reply to paragraph 1**

2. The Committee's recommendations were submitted for discussion by the Slovak Government through the Report on the Progress and Results of the Assessment of the Fourth Periodic Report of the SR to the Covenant. On 24 July 2017, the Slovak Government discussed the material with the Committee's recommendations and adopted Resolution No. 351/2017 in which it instructed the competent ministries to perform the tasks of the entity responsible for implementing the Committee's final recommendations, and also recommended that the RCGP cooperate in the implementation of the Committee's recommendations.

3. Prior to the session of the Slovak Government, the report was discussed in the HRGC<sup>1</sup> which is a permanent expert, advisory, coordinating and consultative body of the Slovak Government in the field of protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms. HRGC takes positions on the national implementation of international obligations of the SR in the field of human rights protection. HRGC is chaired by the Minister of Justice of the Slovak Republic and includes all relevant public administration bodies and institutions and representatives of civil society active in the human rights agenda.

4. The Committee's concluding recommendations addressed to the SR were translated into Slovak and published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic.<sup>2</sup> All implementation reports of the SR on international human rights conventions which the SR is a party to, as well as the recommendations of the relevant UN committees on those reports, are publicly available on the above-mentioned website. The recommendations are also available to the public on the web portal on the sessions of the Slovak Government.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Reply to paragraph 2**

5. In 2023, the NPM was introduced under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (see point 180). The creation of the NPM strengthened the powers of three bodies – the Public Defender of Rights, the Commissioner for Children and the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities.

6. In the context of the competences of the MoJ SR, so-called intervention centres for victims of domestic violence have been created, improving victims' access to assistance and justice (see points 150 to 156).

<sup>1</sup> From October 1, 2024, the HRGC was renamed the Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights and Gender Equality.

<sup>2</sup> <https://mzv.sk/web/sk/diplomacia/temy/ludske-prava/implementacne-spravz-k-ludskopravnym-dohovorom> (in Slovak and English).

<sup>3</sup> <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/22216/1> (in Slovak).

7. A comprehensive reform of the National Equality Body (SNSHR) as a national anti-discrimination body (equality body) and a national human rights institution is being prepared in the context of the directives on standards for equal treatment bodies (Directive 2024/1499/EU and Directive 2024/1500/EU) and is expected to be adopted by 19 June 2026.

8. As of 1 September 2024, the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for National Minorities and the PGRC became the permanent plenipotentiaries of the Slovak Government pursuant to the 2024 amendment to the Competence Act. At the same time, a new advisory body of the Slovak Government – the Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for National Minorities was established and the HRGC was changed the Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights and Gender Equality.

## **B. Specific information on the implementation of Articles 1 to 27 of the ICCPR, including in relation to the Committee’s previous recommendations**

### **The constitutional and legal framework in which the ICCPR is being implemented**

#### **Reply to paragraph 3**

##### *Raising awareness of the ICCPR and its application in practice*

9. The training of judges, court officials and prosecutors is provided by the JA SR which organizes annual training events in the field of human rights and their protection. MoJ SR has compiled a summary of international recommendations of UN committees as a basis for the development of the curriculum.

10. The recommendations and opinions of the UN Committees also serve as a basis for the adoption of new legislation and are part of the explanatory reports. Based on the assessment of several judgments, it can be stated that the courts have referred to the ICCPR in their decisions, in particular when imposing urgent measures concerning restraining orders in cases of domestic violence, the intermediate offence of involuntary homicide and in cases concerning the detention of undocumented persons. Quotations from the judgements may be found below:

- Urgent measures concerning restraining orders on the grounds of domestic violence “The urgent measures referred to above are an effective means of preventive solution to the problem of violence and are among the legal instruments that allow for a rapid legal regulation of the situation which is aimed at protecting persons who find themselves in the position of victims of domestic violence. The right not to be subjected to violence or the imminent threat thereof is a fundamental human right. The right of every person to protection from any form of violence arises not only from the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, but also from international treaties to which the SR is bound, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Covenant, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and others. Violence should be considered any attack directed against a physical person or against the psychological integrity of a person that causes harm to that person.”;
- The intermediate offence of involuntary homicide “It follows from the provisions of Article 17 of the ICCPR that one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence and everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.”;
- Release from detention of an undocumented person: (Syrian woman / unauthorized entry into the territory). “No one shall be deprived of his liberty except in accordance with a procedure established by law... (subparagraph f/) the lawful arrest or other deprivation of liberty of a person in order to prevent his unauthorized entry into the territory or of a person against whom expulsion or extradition proceedings are being taken (also Art. 9(1) of the Covenant and Art. 6 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU).”.

## Reply to paragraph 4

### *Expanding and strengthening the mandate of the SNCHR*

11. During the period under review, a number of changes were adopted regarding the activities of the SNCHR. With effect from 1 May 2022, the Rules of Procedure of the Board of Directors of the SNCHR were amended to introduce a public election of the Executive Director of the SNCHR. If necessary, the public presence is also ensured by an online broadcast. In March 2023, an amendment to the Act No. 564/2001 Coll. on the Public Defender of Rights, as amended, and amending certain acts<sup>4</sup> was adopted, clarifying that reports and recommendations under the SNCHR Act are independent reports. The change regarding the issuance of independent reports and recommendations was adopted in the context of EU Pilot No. 4446/13/JUST.

12. The funding of the SNCHR is gradually increased. The budget of the SNCHR has been increased from EUR 565,356 in 2018 to EUR 967,002 in 2023. In 2022, EUR 74,000 has been allocated to the SNCHR for capital expenditure for the modernisation of the ICT infrastructure, in addition to the operating budget (EUR 870,287). Consequently, the SNCHR increased the number of its professional staff from 16 in 2018 to 26 in 2023. More data is provided in the Annex.

## Non-discrimination

## Reply to paragraph 5

### *Legislative measures in the area of non-discrimination and strengthening the rights of victims of crime*

13. On 12 October 2017, the NC SR adopted the Act No. 274/2017 containing an expanded definition of a victim of crime and granting victims the rights of support under the Act on a non-discriminatory basis in the areas of assistance, professional assistance, legal assistance, protection from secondary victimisation. The offence of trafficking in human beings in relation to causing bodily injuries has been included among the violent offences in relation to which compensation is also granted, while for this offence of trafficking in human beings the Act also regulates moral damages, compensated in an amount not higher than 10 times the minimum wage. At the same time, the Act includes victims of the crime of trafficking in human beings among the particularly vulnerable victims. Section 33 establishes a new competence of the MoJ SR, according to which the MoJ SR ensures the development and implementation of state policy and coordination of the performance of tasks in the field of victim protection; for this purpose, it issues methodological guidelines, publishes information on the rights of victims on its website and cooperates with Member States and international organisations active in the field of protection and support of victims. The Act was amended four times between 2018–2023 to strengthen victims' rights.

### *Raising awareness of the framework for the protection of victims of discrimination*

14. Each year the JA SR offers a number of training activities for judges which are focused on various aspects of human rights, including education on the case law of the ECtHR. In 2023, the JA SR organised training on "Selected Issues of Anti-Discrimination Law" which focused mainly on the defining features of the principle of equal treatment, areas, forms of discrimination and explanation of exceptions in the form of so-called temporary compensatory measures. In the same year, the topic of discrimination in employment relations was also the subject of a training course called "Current Issues in Employment Law". For 2024, a training course called "The Non-Discrimination Standard in the Context of International Human Rights Standards" is planned.

<sup>4</sup> Act No. 110/2023 Coll. amending the Act No. 564/2001 Coll. on the Public Defender of Rights, as amended, and amending certain acts.

*Non-legislative measures in the field of non-discrimination and combating anti-Roma racism*

15. A specific action plan for the prevention of all forms of discrimination for the next period has not been adopted, as there are individual action plans in various areas aimed at preventing discrimination in individual areas, e.g. combating anti-Roma racism, combating extremism and radicalization, and gender equality, etc.

16. The issue of combating anti-Roma racism is a part of the Strategy 2030 which was approved by the Slovak Government by the Resolution No. 181 of 7 April 2021. Strategy 2030 APs were approved by the Slovak Government by the Resolution No. 256 of 6 April 2022. The global objective of the action plan to combat anti-Roma racism and promote participation is to eliminate anti-Roma racism, promote anti-discrimination and participation, and increase the protection of the most vulnerable groups and individuals. In terms of the access to justice, the action plan also includes the tasks of regular training on anti-Roma racism for all stakeholders involved in the provision of legal, social and health services in the public interest, including civil society organisations.

17. The issue of combating anti-Roma racism is a part of the Concept of Combating Radicalisation and Extremism until 2024 which was adopted by the Slovak Government on 13 January 2021.

18. The SR is a member of the IHRA. The NC SR agreed with the working definition of anti-Semitism developed by the IHRA with the NC SR Resolution No. 1490 of 28 November 2018. The NC SR also endorsed the working definition of anti-Roma racism developed by the IHRA with the NC SR Resolution No. 1635 of 27 September 2022. The working definition of anti-Roma racism has become the basis for other public policy documents under the competence of the OPGRC.

*Measures to prevent and sanction extremism and non-discrimination*

19. In 2018 the MoI SR in the MoI SR Regulation No. 42/2018 on combating extremism and spectator violence again laid down a single comprehensive course of action of the PF SR and the MoI SR.

20. In 2022 the MoI SR again amended the Regulation of the Minister of the Interior of the Slovak Republic No. 44/2020 on the implementation of the tasks and measures of the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The aforementioned regulation ordered the competent components of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic to cooperate with the RCGP in cases of suspected violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of members of the MRC by the official activities of the officers of the PF SR, in particular in cases of suspicion of ill-treatment, discriminatory treatment or disproportionate use of force.

21. The Order of the President of the PF SR No. 111/2019 on the performance of tasks to ensure the implementation of recommendations of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) also ordered the PF SR to cooperate with the OPGRC in cases of reported suspicions of violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons in the course of police officers' official interventions against members of the Roma national minority.

*Litigation settlements and indemnities*

22. On 24 November 2021 the Slovak Government adopted Resolution No. 674, apologizing to women who underwent sterilization in violation of the law. The Slovak Government apologized for cases of sterilisations and violations of human rights (especially) of Roma women in the years 1966–1989 and 1990–2004, and identified the practices at that time as inadmissible and a violation of human rights.

23. On 23 June 2021 the Slovak Government adopted the Resolution No. 367 where it apologized for the way the national armed forces intervened in Moldava nad Bodvou in 2013. In this case, as in others, the OPGRC lodged relevant motion and criminal complaints.

## **Hate crimes, hate speech and increasing radicalisation in political discourse and in the media**

### **Reply to paragraph 6**

#### *Measures to sanction hate crimes, hate speech and radicalisation*

24. The concept of hate crimes which is used in several documents and recommendations of international organisations and whose occurrence is monitored by such organisations, is not explicitly defined in the Slovak criminal law. Hate crimes, hate speech, racism and radicalisation are included under the offence of extremism.

25. Racially motivated offences are included in several provisions of the Criminal Act. Section 140 (e) of the Criminal Act defines a special motive as committing a hate crime against a group of persons or an individual for their actual or presumed affiliation to a race, nation, nationality, ethnic group, their real or presumed origin, skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, political belief or religion. The special motive is part of the qualified criminal offence, i.e. that it is a form of committing an offence for which there is a higher sanction.

26. A comprehensive recodification of the criminal law is tentatively scheduled for 2026.

27. In the period under review, the GP SR exercised its legislative competence as a mandatory commentator in the legislative procedure the subject of which were criminal law measures to combat hate speech and growing radicalisation in the socio-political and media environment. A list of such activities is annexed.

28. The application of Act No. 91/2016 Coll. on Criminal Liability of Legal Persons and on amendments to certain acts, as amended, was positively reflected in the period under review. The law introduced direct criminal liability in the SR relating to legal persons who commit crimes, including crimes of extremism.

29. In criminal proceedings, the Prosecutor's Office prosecutes perpetrators of extremism offences under the Section 140a of the Criminal Act. More information on the overview of the accused (prosecuted) persons is contained in the Annex.

30. The SR has made significant progress in the area of combating extremism following legislative and organisational changes in force since 2017 and linked to the specialisation of law enforcement authorities. The number of detected and investigated cases has increased, and common serious right-wing extremist events have been eliminated. Charges were gradually brought against members of music groups, radical football fans, as well as online sellers of extremist materials. These prosecutions have had the effect of softening the rhetoric and other public expressions of extremist actors and have sparked efforts to anonymise extremist speech in the virtual environment.

31. In terms of international cooperation, members of the PF SR act as members of expert networks of the European Commission (RANPOL, EENeT) and participate in transnational projects and training programmes (e.g. TAHCLE).

32. The PF SR used the knowledge gained within the TAHCLE programme for the application of the so-called bias indicators through a manual for the PF SR officers entitled "Hate Crimes". This manual was distributed in 2018 to all first contact officers of the PF SR. In 2018 the police unit in charge of combating extremism in the area of responsibility of the MoI SR also issued a guideline for the PF SR units on the procedure before the initiation of criminal prosecution and during the preparatory proceedings in the investigation of hate crimes, i.e. extremism crimes.

33. As for combating extremism, in the period under review the PF SR, among other things, fulfilled tasks resulting from strategic-conceptual materials approved by the Slovak Government, in particular from the Concept of Combating Extremism for 2015–2019 and the subsequently adopted Concept of Combating Radicalisation and Extremism until 2024.

34. The PF SR continuously evaluates the application of legislation affecting its activities in the field of countering extremism.

35. In addition to the Security Council SR, several platforms are used by the PF SR to coordinate activities aimed at preventing and combating radicalisation, extremism and terrorism:

- Committee for the Prevention and Elimination of Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance of the HRGC (VRAX);
- Inter-Ministerial Expert Group for the Coordination of Information Exchange and Cooperation in the Field of Combating Terrorism at the National Level;
- The National Expert Group on the Elimination of Racially Motivated Crime, Extremism and Terrorism of the Inter-Ministerial Expert Coordination Body on Combating Crime;
- National Security Analysis Centre (NBAC).

*Measures to promote non-discrimination and tolerance of minorities*

36. Preventive measures against stigmatization, national, racial or religious hatred and measures to promote tolerance and inclusion of minorities are formulated in the *Action Plans for the Protection of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities and Ethnic Groups*. The Action Plans have been developed by the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for National Minorities in a participatory manner in cooperation with relevant ministries and the CNMEG.

37. The tasks of the 1st operational objective of the Action Plan 2016–2020 “Ensuring a comprehensive approach to the creation of legislation relating to the rights and status of national minorities and ethnic groups” have been fulfilled or are in process. Within the framework of this objective, an analysis of the legal regulations in the area of the rights and status of national minorities and ethnic groups was carried out; an analysis of the possibility of using temporary compensatory measures in the area of preventing discrimination against persons belonging to national minorities and ethnic groups was carried out, and methodologies for adopting temporary compensatory measures in this area were developed.

38. The Action Plan 2021–2025 builds on the previous action plan and focuses on activities aimed at combating discrimination, racism and xenophobia faced by ethnic minorities, especially the Roma, while it emphasizes strengthening education in media and general education towards building an inclusive awareness. The Action Plan is also focused on the legislative and institutional protection of the rights and status of national minorities. The programme framework in this area was based on the Programme Declaration of the Slovak Government (2020–2024) and later for the years (2021–2024). In these documents the Slovak Government undertook to adopt an act on the status of national minorities as one of the means to slow down the assimilation of members of national minorities and to guarantee the exercise of minority rights under the Slovak Constitution.

39. The MoJ SR continued to support projects within the framework of the subsidy scheme for the promotion, support and protection of human rights and freedoms and for the prevention of all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other manifestations of intolerance. The subsidy scheme focused mainly on increasing tolerance, preventing extremism, and supporting human rights education and research related to equality and discrimination. Approximately EUR 770,000 is allocated from the state budget for the subsidy scheme annually.

40. In the AP Strategy 2030, in the priority area Combating anti-Roma racism, activity 2.5.2 is defined: “Create in each region (or support an existing one) at least one permanent exhibition of Roma culture and history in an existing museum, which is under the jurisdiction of higher territorial units. In this area, the Prešov Self-Governing Region implemented a traveling exhibition of 11 works of art on the topic of the Roma Holocaust in 2023. The exhibition continues in 2024.

41. In 2023, the OPGRC cooperated with the Holocaust Museum in Sered' to prepare the exhibition “Persecution of the Roma during the Holocaust”. The exhibition included educational activities and discussions in elementary schools. The RCGP also participated in the opening of the exhibition.

42. In cooperation with the MoC SR, the Slovak National Museum and the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the civic association In Minorita is implementing the “Ma bisteren!” project. Within the framework of the project, 8 memorials and commemorative plaques of the Roma Holocaust were installed in the SR between 2005 and 2019. In 2020 the State Scientific Library in Prešov in cooperation with In Minorita documented the memorial sites and transferred them into a virtual form. Each memorial contains a text section with information about the authors, dates of access, as well as historical events. The virtual tour also includes a quiz for primary and secondary school pupils, which was created in cooperation with the Methodological and Pedagogical Centre in Prešov.

43. The MoE SR, through NIEY, has ensured the translation of the electronic publication IHRA Recommendations for teaching and learning about the Holocaust from the English original into Slovak (Odporúčania pre výchovu a vzdelávanie o holokauste). This is a methodological guide for educators on how to effectively approach the challenging issue of the Holocaust in a way that is beneficial for students and that the related educational and training goals are met<sup>5</sup> (see point 18).

44. In the area of combating extremist crimes, the cooperation between the OPGRC and NCA continued. In 2017 the OPGRC, in cooperation with the Holocaust Documentation Centre, the Slovak National Archives and the Jewish Museum of the Slovak National Museum (SNM), submitted a petition to the Prosecutor General for the dissolution of the political party Kotleba – ĽSNS.

45. The submission included extensive monitoring of the historical and political discourse in the activities of the party and its members. As a part of the monitoring, the regulations of the Hlinka Guard as well as the denial of the Holocaust were also mapped and submitted to the NCA. The aforementioned helped law enforcement authorities in prosecuting crimes based on the transfer and dissemination of Nazi, National Socialist and People’s Socialist ideology, concepts and symbolism. In its 2019 judgement, file No. 4Volpp/1/2017, the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic dismissed the Prosecutor General’s lawsuit and ultimately did not dissolve the political party due to “the lack of opportunities to implement the change (i.e. the size of the party and the number of seats in the parliament), and thus a lack of an imminent threat to democracy.” However, this process, together with the ongoing criminal proceedings and campaigns by the democratic forces, meant that the party did not make it to the NC SR in the following elections, and there was also a transfer of its members to other political entities. Currently, this party is an extra-parliamentary and marginal party.

46. In cooperation between the MoI SR and the OPGRC, a working group to address the issue of socially excluded groups was established by the MoI SR Measure No. 122/2017, composed of relevant components of the MoI SR, the PPF SR and the directors of the regional directorates of the PF SR.

47. Educational cooperation between the OPGRC, PPF SR and MoI SR continued in the field of qualification training of PF SR officers – especially senior officers for work in the communities. In 2019 and in the subsequent years as well, the OPGRC participated in an accredited special educational program entitled “*Specifics of Performance of a Senior Community Service Provider*”. In addition, by modifying the internal regulations in 2017 and 2018, the PF SR strengthened the function and working methods of the senior officers for work in the communities also in relation to local government units.

48. On the basis of cooperation between the OPGRC, PF SR, the ODIHR and the Council of Europe, a training course on effective police practices with regard to human rights when intervening in Roma and Sinti communities was held in 2018. The ODIHR training program included scientific and teaching staff of the APF and teachers of secondary vocational schools of the PF SR. The aim of the training was to permanently integrate the acquired qualifications from the course into the departmental education system. The content of the training included e.g. human rights norms and their correct application, interrogation techniques, conducting interviews or dialogue with the community. In 2019, similar training was organized by the

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.statpedu.sk/sk/aktuality/metodicka-prirucka-vyucbu-vzdelavanie-holokauste.html> (in Slovak).

OPGRC with the Council of Europe for the PF SR units, including the ISO, with a special focus on good community practices.

49. In order to eliminate the escalation of situations in the field of public order and conflict situations that would justify the deployment of the PF SR, resources from the Operational Programme Human Resources were spent in the programming period 2014–2020 to support LCOS in municipalities with the presence of the MRC. LCOS represent an important new communication channel between the community and the PF SR. The total allocation in the first phase was set at EUR 10 million and later increased to more than EUR 22 million for 202 projects that are currently under implementation.

50. In the area of so-called forced evictions, an example of the new procedures is the provision of a subsidy to the OPGRC of EUR 380,000 for the removal of disrepair and the construction of alternative housing for the marginalised Roma community in the municipality of Telgárt (2023). Similarly, the subsidy was used to provide alternative housing for Roma families whose homes were located on land with the construction of the highway in the Zelený Most – Svrčinovec section (2022–2023). The Slovak Government approved this solution, including the provision of a subsidy, taking into account the case law of the ECtHR on forced evictions.

#### *Measures to promote minority inclusion*

51. Inclusion Strategy, adopted in 2022, takes into account the need for the acceptability of the form and content of education for all, in order to reach the potential of learners. Another goal of the Inclusion Strategy is to respect cultural and linguistic requirements, individual needs and specificities of persons with disabilities and members of other groups. The document defines the direction of public policies towards achieving inclusive education of children, pupils and students.

52. The Action Plan (2022–2024) consists of six areas: The Inclusion Strategy outputs include action plans prepared in three-year cycles. The Action Plan (2022–2024) consists of six areas: 1. Inclusive education and support measures; 2. Counselling system in education; 3. Desegregation in education and training; 4. Debarrierization of the school environment; 5. Preparation and education of teaching and professional staff; 6. Destigmatization.

53. The content standard “Social and political tensions – conflict, war, extremism and tolerance” is a part of the national curriculum in the 7th grade of primary schools. In the 8th year the Innovated National Education Programme (INEP) contains the educational standard “Human Rights and Freedoms” which includes content standards in the area of human rights and freedoms, prejudice and discrimination. The state educational curriculum for primary education 2023 in the educational field of “Human and society” among other things enables students to understand the geographical, historical, cultural, religious, economic and political specificities in different parts of the world, which leads to respect and consideration for other people, cultures and spiritual values, as well as for oneself.

### **Discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons**

#### **Reply to paragraph 7**

##### *Regulation of same-sex legal relationships*

54. During the period under review, the MoJ presented solutions to improve the regulation of legal relations between cohabitants or close persons, including same-sex couples.

55. The Fiduciary Declaration Bill was intended to simplify the situation regarding cohabitants’ property rights, while respecting the institution of marriage as a unique union. It was also intended to improve the position of people close to each other, as well as to ensure the continuity of property management, its control and the use of its income to support the family. However, these proposals did not receive support from the LGBTI community and were therefore withdrawn.

*The procedure for legal recognition of genders*

56. Legal recognition of gender falls under the responsibility of the MoI SR. The process of transition, which is legally referred to as “gender reassignment” in the SR, consists of two parts – medical transition and legal transition (administrative gender reassignment).

57. The legal system of the SR allows for gender reassignment, which is regulated in several legal acts within the competence of the MoI SR, in particular the Personal Identification Number Act and the Name and Surname Act. Legal transition (administrative change of sex) requires a change in the basic identification data of the person (personal identification number, first name and surname). The personal identification number contains an indication of the person’s sex, as does the person’s given name and surname the grammatical form of which expresses the person’s sex.

58. The period prior to the legal recognition of gender reassignment is described in the Name and Surname Act according to which the district authority will allow a natural person undergoing gender reassignment to use a neutral name and surname on the basis of his/her request and a certificate from the health facility where the “gender reassignment treatment” is taking place. Pursuant to Section 7(1)(c) of the Name and Surname Act, a name change permission is not required if the change of name is due to a gender reassignment.

59. Pursuant to Section 7(3) of the Name and Surname Act, a change of name or a change of surname for which no permission is required is made at the registry office on the basis of a written declaration by the person whose name or surname is being changed, or by his/her legal representative; in the case of a change of name or a change of surname due to a gender reassignment, a medical opinion must also be submitted. Pursuant to Section 8(2)(b) of the Personal Identification Number Act, the MoI SR shall, upon request, change the personal identification number on the basis of a medical opinion on the gender reassignment of the person. It follows from the above-stated that the only legal requirement for a change and entry of a person’s basic identification data in the registry office is a medical opinion or a public document issued by a medical institution. Medical opinion is issued by a health care provider in the field of psychiatry and certifies that the person has undergone a medical transition (gender reassignment), or that the person has completed a medical transition.

*Availability of transition-related healthcare*

60. Pursuant to Section 4(3) of the Act No. 576/2004, in order for health care to be provided correctly, it must be provided in accordance with standard procedures for the performance of prevention, standard diagnostic procedures and standard therapeutic procedures.

61. From the point of view of legal relevance, standard practice, whether national or international, taking into account the latest current knowledge of medical practice (so-called evidence-based medicine) is the guiding principle in the matter of medical transition (medical sex reassignment). According to the international standards for the treatment of adults with transsexualism (dg. F64.0 – transgender person), the concept of medical transition (medical procedures for the provision of health care to an adult with transsexualism) consists of either undergoing surgery to alter genitalia or secondary sex characteristics, or taking hormone treatment.

62. Health care for transgender persons is provided by sexologists or psychiatrists with at least 5 years of experience. For a period of several years, training in the sexology specialization was not available to psychiatrists and child psychiatrists, and the number of such sexologists has drastically declined. However, there are currently approximately 20 doctors in the specialisation training in sexology in the SR who will complete their training at the end of 2024. The situation with the provision of health care to transgender people is expected to improve during 2025.

## Discrimination and exclusion of Roma

### Reply to paragraph 8

#### *Strategic framework documents in the field of Roma integration*

63. In April 2021 the Slovak Government approved the Strategy 2030 as a framework strategic document which is the Slovak Government's commitment defining the direction of public policies at the level of priorities in order to achieve a visible change in the field of Roma equality and inclusion. The Strategy 2030 builds on the SR Strategy for Roma Integration until 2020. Four priority areas – employment, education, health and housing – remain the key topics. Particular emphasis is placed on non-discrimination and stepping up interventions to combat anti-Roma racism. Action plans (Action Plans to the Strategy 2030 for 2022–2024) defining concrete measures and activities in each priority area are adopted for the Strategy 2030 (see points 15 to 16).

64. The above-stated strategies and their action plans were funded by the EU and the state budget in the programming period 2014–2020; in the current programming period 2021–2027 they are funded through the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the state budget. National projects have also been a specific form of measures to combat and prevent Roma segregation.

65. Since 1 June 2021, the OPGRC has been a part of the organisational structure of the GO SR which has also become the central state administration body for the coordination of the implementation of the MRC inclusion since 1 November 2022. On behalf of the GO SR, this task is carried out by the OPGRC as a separate organisational unit. On the basis of the above-mentioned legal regulation, the OPGRC also has the status of an international contact point and, at the same time, the status of an intermediary body in the field of supporting the MRC inclusion.

66. As an intermediary body, the OPGRC provides a NRFC for MRC inclusion projects in areas ensuring better access of Roma to housing, education, inclusion in the labour market, drinking water, environment and health care. In its area of competence, the OPGRC has an allocation of EUR 399.5 million for such projects. EU funding is also earmarked for Roma empowerment by other intermediary bodies that fund such projects, targeting both the MRC and the majority population.

67. The OPGRC also implements funds amounting to more than EUR 4.8 million from the Recovery and Resilience Plan and from the state budget for its own operations (staff and material expenses).

68. The European Programmes Section of the OPGRC provides NRCF for demand-oriented investment and non-investment projects<sup>6</sup> and for national projects.<sup>7</sup> More information is provided in the Annex.

69. The OPGRC also ensures the provision of subsidies pursuant to the Act No. 524/2010, namely to support social and cultural needs and to address particularly adverse situations of the Roma community. These are smaller projects from which funds have also been provided to deal with emergency situations (for example dwellings affected by fire or a kindergarten affected by an earthquake. The funds spent on such projects in 2023 exceeded EUR 1 million.

#### *Combating and preventing segregation in employment and social services*

70. Call *National Project Development Teams I (2023)* with allocated resources from the budgets of the SR and the EU in the amount of EUR 69.6 million is aimed at promoting socio-economic integration and improving the living conditions of marginalised communities, such as the Roma. The call is open to individual municipalities as well as Roma communities residing in a municipality. There are positions in the project such as a development planning officer whose task is to support the improvement of the living standards of the community through an active participation of its inhabitants and the cooperation of MRC representatives

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/sekcia-europskych-programov/>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/narodne-projekty/>.

with relevant partners at the local government level. The project also includes positions supporting a comprehensive development of children from the Roma community, a development officer for job counselling, a development officer for youth, a development officer for housing, a social worker, an assistant of the development teams centre and a counsellor for parents. So far, the project is set to target 60 municipalities listed in the Atlas of Roma Communities, for which sectoral calls will be prepared in the areas of housing, public health, education and employment. The first results of the project are in the Annex.

71. *National Project Field Social Work and Field Work in Municipalities with Marginalized Roma Communities II (2020–2023)*<sup>8</sup> focused with its content on promoting sustainable development, reintegration into society and improving living conditions. As of 31 July 2023, the project involved 168 municipalities, employed 274 field social workers and 278 field workers. The interventions covered areas such as employment, housing, finance and management, socio-pathological phenomena and education. The national project has been continuously extended to 44 more municipalities.

72. *National Project Community Services in Towns and Villages with the Presence of Marginalized Roma Communities – stage II (2021–2023)*<sup>9</sup> focused on social services of crisis intervention provided in community centres. Specialised social counselling was designed to help in situations where a person does not have the necessary conditions to meet his/her existential needs; where his/her integration into society is threatened due to threatening life habits, addictions or other harmful activities; due to an adverse health condition or due to remaining in a spatially segregated locality with the presence of concentrated and generationally reproduced poverty. The services provided also included assistance in the exercise of rights and legally protected interests, preventive activities, leisure activities, assistance in preparing for schooling and support for non-formal education of children, youth and adults, individual and group community rehabilitation for adults and performance of community activities for the general public with the aim of sensitising public opinion. The project contributed to improving the quality of life by providing career and financial counselling, as well as debt/personal bankruptcy assistance and financial literacy education. Detailed results of the project are in the Annex.

#### *Combating and preventing segregation in education*

73. The MoE SR fulfils the tasks under the Recovery and Resilience Plan in the field of regional education under two components: *Component 6: Availability, development and quality of inclusive education at all levels* and *Component 7: Education for the 21st century*. The total amount allocated to projects under each call of the Recovery and Resilience Plan is as follows:

- Increasing the capacity of kindergartens (Component 6) more than EUR 82.5 million;
- Increasing the capacity of elementary schools (Component 7) more than EUR 34.9 million;
- Elimination of two-shift school operation (Component 7) more than EUR 34.6 million.

74. The reforms and investments in Component 6 are in line with the proposals of the National Programme for the Development of Education and Upbringing and other strategic documents aimed at social inclusion of disadvantaged groups, combating poverty and social exclusion. The reforms and investments are also in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

75. The implementation of the *National Project for the Inclusion of Children from MRC in Kindergartens* (the so-called NP PRIM I and II) has contributed to the creation of conditions for the elimination of the inclusion of Roma children outside mainstream education in the so-called special education. NP PRIM II is followed up by the National

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/narodne-projekty/narodny-projekt-terenna-socialna-praca-a-terenna-praca-v-obciach-s-pritomnostou-marginalizovanych-romskych-komunit-ii/> (in Slovak)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/narodne-projekty/komunitne-sluzby-v-mestach-a-obciach-s-pritomnostou-marginalizovanych-romskych-komunit-ii-faza/> (in Slovak).

Project “Supporting the Helping Professions” (NP POP3) which supports the work positions of teaching, professional and non-teaching staff in schools to ensure equal opportunities in education, especially in relation to vulnerable groups in education (e.g. members of MRC, people with disabilities, people likely to under-perform at school or potential early school-leavers). At the same time, the aim is also to ensure access to high-quality and inclusive education, including the investment in prevention through the work of support teams. The project is implemented by the NIEY.

76. In the legislative area, the NC SR adopted in May 2023 a legislative definition of segregation, proposed by the MoE SR May 2023 as part of the School Act. This legislative step introduced two new concepts to the School Act: “segregation in education and upbringing” and “compliance with the prohibition of segregation in education and upbringing”. The SR introduced its own definition of prohibited school segregation into the School Act for the effective elimination of segregative practices in education. The definition of segregation in education and upbringing in the School Act is cross-cutting, defining segregation through all possible grounds of discrimination listed in the ADA.

77. In the methodological area the MoE SR has developed a number of materials to provide schools and founders with practical guidance on how to address segregation and to explain in detail the concepts approved in the School Act, also in response to comments from the European Commission:

- Methodological material on school desegregation for founders and principals – Together in the same classroom (2022);
- Methodological guide on desegregation in education and training (2023).

78. In the above-mentioned area, the MoE SR has developed concepts for the correct setting, evaluation and communication of desegregation policies and their transformation into effective inclusive measures:

- Concept for monitoring the risk of segregation (2023);
- Concept of the desegregation communication plan.

79. An amendment to the School Act introduced a new guidance and prevention system<sup>10</sup> which facilitates more targeted setting of support for different categories of children and pupils with special educational needs, including children and pupils from socially disadvantaged and marginalised communities and suffering from generational poverty.

80. With effect from 1 September 2023, the MoE SR approved and published the Standards of professional activities in the system of counselling and prevention, in order to improve the diagnostic procedures for determining the educational needs of children and pupils.<sup>11</sup>

81. On the initiative of the MoE SR, an amendment to the School Act introduced support measures in May 2023 with the aim to offer targeted and timely assistance to enable every child to participate fully in education and upbringing and to develop their knowledge, skills and abilities. In September 2023 a website on the support measures<sup>12</sup> was launched, containing also a Catalogue of Support Measures and methodological materials. Such actions help create activities to promote school maturity, strengthen pupils’ language skills, provide tutoring, support the elimination of early school leaving, or provide support staff in schools.

82. In 2024 the MoE SR in cooperation with the NIEY is implementing tasks aimed at educating teaching staff and professional staff in the form of professional events. The aim of such activities is to support schools, school establishments and social assistance institutions in building a learning organisation system in line with the values of democracy, participation and active citizenship in education and upbringing and against the spread of extremism, radicalism, discrimination, racism, xenophobia and totalitarian ideologies suppressing human rights.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2021/415/20220101.html> (in Slovak).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.minedu.sk/standardy-odbornych-cinnosti-v-systeme-poradenstva-a-prevencie> (in Slovak)

<sup>12</sup> <https://podporneopatrenia.minedu.sk> (in Slovak).

83. In 2024 the MoE SR in cooperation with the Research Institute ensures the quality of services and professional guidance of employees in the system of counselling and prevention, namely in the form of training the teaching staff and professional staff in the field of mental health inclusion and prevention.<sup>13</sup>

*Combating and preventing segregation in the area of health*

84. The objective of the NP COVID MRC in communities with the MRC presence was to minimize the risk of an outbreak of the epidemic directly at the local level, to prepare the population for further waves of COVID-19, and to eliminate the threat of other epidemics. Another objective of the NP COVID MRC was to improve the access to health care and public health.

85. The project provided targeted and comprehensive methodological support and expert interventions through crisis advisory teams composed of experts in four areas: (1) food, nutrition and water; (2) hygiene and sanitation; (3) health and quarantine; and (4) communication, mediation and support.

86. The project has had positive benefits for users, for example in the provision of hygiene and food packages for households threatened by the pandemic, as well as in the provision of face masks, with much of the material and food assistance acquired for free.

87. Thanks to the project 200 villages with the MRC population of 35,000 people had better access to health care and public health, including preventive health care and education about COVID-19. 23 project team members were involved in the care of the affected villages. Support interventions were provided by 216 COVID-19 field assistants, including 120 Roma men and women. The COVID-19 field assistants worked in municipalities that are included in the Atlas of Roma Communities, but where helping professions are not active and where other national projects are not implemented.

88. The project also included educational activities on the importance and necessity of vaccinating the MRC population against COVID-19 and on the topic of vaccination. Such trainings were intended for the helping professions working not only in the NP COVID MRC itself but also in other national projects. 738 participants from the helping professions and selected representatives of towns and villages were trained on the subject.

89. The above-stated projects were combined with demand-oriented projects in the area of investment in settlement infrastructure of the MRC population within the PA of the Operational Programme Human Resources, namely PA 6 Technical equipment in settlements with MRC.

90. The “Healthy Regions” organisation which is implementing the National Project “Healthy Communities” is also active in the field of MRC health promotion. The main objective of the project is to improve the health situation of the MRC population through HPAs. The role of HPAs is to work with patients from MRC during their stay in hospital facilities, primarily in OB-GYN and paediatric wards, but also outside them. Trained HPAs with knowledge of the Roma language and the MRC environment contribute significantly to overcoming barriers in the process of health care delivery for patients and staff. The project effectively involves people from the target group and all stakeholders. The project implementation started in 2017 and it has a nationwide scope.

91. HPAs operate in more than 280 locations in the least developed regions of the country and their activities have a direct positive impact on approximately 180,000 MRC members. Thanks to their activities, the COVID-19 vaccination rate reached 100% in many villages.

92. In cooperation with the Society for Planned Parenthood, Healthy Regions developed a reproductive rights education methodology through which participants received information on family planning. They also prepared training for the HPAs about the need to increase the number of visits and preventive examinations in gynaecological outpatient clinics.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2021/415/20220101.html> (in Slovak).

*Combating and preventing segregation in the area of housing*

93. *The National Project “Land Settlement Support”* aimed to support the process of land settlement in municipalities with MRC and Roma settlements. The national project helped partially settle – transfer lands in 20 municipalities, 801 dwellings are currently in the process of land settlement and the process has finished for further 87 dwellings (i.e. a purchase or rental agreement was concluded). Other land settlement processes are ongoing, but this is a long-term and challenging process involving multiple actors, and their success depends on the ability of the resident to pay.

94. Within the framework of the individual sub-activities of the national project, geodetic mapping of the terrain was carried out in 147 municipalities and 234 Roma settlements; in 24 municipalities preparation and training of the population in the field of financial literacy and land settlement was carried out; the preparation of geometric plans and expert opinions was facilitated; purchase and lease contracts were prepared and the related administrative fees were paid.

95. Legislative amendments were also made within the framework of the national project. Act No. 330/1991 Coll. on Land Adjustments, Land Ownership, Land Authorities, Land Fund and Land Communities was repeatedly amended in order to speed up and open the process of land adjustments of the lands located under the dwellings of the MRC settlements. At the same time, the Decree of the MoJ SR No. 492/2004 Coll. on the determination of the general value of property was modified.

96. In the period under review, funds from the Operational Programme Human Resources (2014–2020) were spent on overcoming poverty in MRC settlements, namely within the framework of the PA 5 Integration of marginalised Roma communities and PA 6 Technical equipment in settlements with MRC. The total allocation for PA 5 from the EU and Slovak budget amounted to more than EUR 190 million, while the total contracting amount was higher than EUR 189 million (99,42%). More detailed information is provided in the Annex.

97. In the area of improving the access of MRC to housing, programmes in the area of housing development (Housing Development Programme) are being implemented. In cooperation with other ministries and in coordination with the OPGRC, the MoT SR is contributing to the implementation of the objectives of the Strategy 2030, one of the main priorities of which is also improvement of the overall access to housing for MRC.

98. Shifting the OPGRC from the MoI SR to the GO SR (through an amendment to the Competence Act) led to preservation of all subsidy titles of the OPGRC. At the same time, a new subsidy title was promoted, namely to support the acquisition of municipal housing on a community-based participatory system. This system is efficient, merit-based, sustainable and saves public resources. At the same time, through the Act No. 201/2022 the OPGRC has also included the regulation of self-help construction in the subsidy system.

99. Spatial planning systematically and comprehensively addresses the spatial layout and functional use of the territory, and determines its principles and regulations. Municipalities' land use plans the procurement and approval of which is the responsibility of the municipalities are an important basis for permitting of constructions. The Act No. 200/2022 Coll. on Spatial Planning, as amended, introduced the obligation to protect healthy living conditions in municipal and urban spatial plans. Such protection includes sufficient spatial conditions for housing with regard to disadvantaged or vulnerable persons (including persons living in spatially segregated locations with concentrated and generational poverty). In this case, it was a specific regulation ensuring a non-discriminatory exercise of the right of establishment.

100. The issue of eviction and demolition of Roma settlements, as well as the construction of anti-Roma walls, relates to the Construction Act which does not allow to authorise any construction whose primary purpose is the segregation of any group of the Slovak population.

101. The legislation currently in force, in particular the Building Act, permits the ordering of the building to be vacated only in exceptional cases, which are an immediate threat to the life or health of persons using the building in question. In the case of building vacating proceedings (in the case of a building containing flats), the building office is obliged to notify

the owner of the building in order to provide the users of the endangered building with housing compensation.

102. The Expropriation Act permits the use of the expropriation institute only as an extreme alternative applicable subject to the fulfilment of the statutory conditions. The expropriation procedure sets out stricter conditions for the purchase of residential buildings. It must be shown that the expropriation procedure was preceded by an unsuccessful submission of a written proposal for an agreement, including an offer to provide replacement housing.

103. The area of eviction from public land and subsequent provision of adequate replacement housing is entirely in the competence of the local government. The MoT SR only provides subsidies for the acquisition of rental flats for social housing (pursuant to the Act No. 443/2010 Coll. on Subsidies for Housing Development and on Social Housing, as amended). It is up to the local government to decide how alternative housing will be provided. Under this subsidy scheme, it is possible to receive a subsidy of up to 75% of the acquisition cost of the dwelling. The MoT SR is only the provider of the financial subsidy in this system. All decisions concerning the project, starting with the building permit, procurement of the construction contractor, etc., are the direct responsibility of the local government. The affected community can also be involved by the local government in the construction process as well as in the subsequent operation of the dwellings.

104. The Act No. 201/2022 introduced the institute of building certification for Roma buildings constructed between 1 January 1990 and 31 March 2024 without a building permit or notification and located in a spatially segregated location with concentrated and generationally reproduced poverty. Certification is made only upon presenting a proof of ownership or other rights to the land, proof of use of the building for residential purposes, and proof that the building does not endanger life and is not located in an inappropriate location (e.g., in a protection zone). The Act also introduced a legal fiction of permissibility for buildings built before 1 October 1976 and a legal fiction for buildings built between 1 October 1976 and 31 December 1989. Buildings are deemed to be authorised if they are continuously used for their intended purpose and the owner of the building is the owner of the land on which such building is built or has other rights over the land or is in the process of regularising the relationship to the land. These two procedures apply to buildings of all citizens. This regulation has also been adopted in the Building Act.

105. With effect from March 2017, the Act No. 7/2005 Coll. on Bankruptcy and Restructuring and on amendments to certain acts has been amended, protective institutes and processes in personal bankruptcy and debt relief have been modified, including the introduction of the institute of non-disposable value of a dwelling.

106. In general, there are no legal obstacles to the application of the ICCPR in the area of MRC housing.

### **Reply to paragraph 9**

#### *Strategic programming frameworks*

107. On 27 June 2018, the Slovak Government approved the National Programme for the Development of Education and Upbringing which determines the direction of Slovak education for the next ten years (2018–2027). The National Programme was updated in November 2022. The strategic policy framework for the education and training system at all levels for (2024–2026) is the implementation plan of the National Programme.

108. The first strategic objective of the National Programme is to reduce the proportion of 15-year-olds with poor results in reading, mathematics and science to less than 15% by 2030. The Opportunity for All Children project is being implemented under this objective.

109. Since December 2023, the MoE SR has undergone a significant change, which included a participatory strategy for the creation of the GPS with the participation of key partner organizations in the Slovak education system and representatives of individual sections and organizations of the MoE SR. The intention was to create a document that would name the key objectives for education, training and science in the years 2023–2027.

110. The short-term priorities of the education policy of the GPS include e.g. the following priorities:

- The opportunity to find employment in adulthood and lead a dignified and fulfilling adult life;
- Improvement the quality of education for children suffering from generational poverty, with disabilities, or otherwise disadvantaged pupils;
- Implementation of inclusive measures, while respecting the needs of ethnic schooling.

111. Education policy priorities have been translated into the Change Programme which is a framework of 39 projects with named objectives, methods of delivery, key milestones and project managers responsible for their achievement. The Programme is intended to contribute to improving the state of education in Slovakia from early childhood through to entry into the labour market, including improving the quality of education for children and pupils from generational poverty, disabled and otherwise disadvantaged children and pupils. The implementation of the programme will also lead to increased participation in pre-primary education, particularly in regions where the problem is most acute and where children's non-participation in pre-primary education is related to the socio-economic status of their families. These objectives and activities will be implemented on an ongoing basis between 2024 and 2026.

112. The MoE SR is actively cooperating on the action plan of the MoC SR "Vision for the Development of Roma Culture, Language and Identity Support for 2022–2024".

#### *Measures in the field of inclusion*

113. With effect from September 2019, a legal obligation to start compulsory pre-primary education was established for all children who reach the age of 5 by 31 August of the year preceding the start of the new school year (Act No. 209/2019 which amended the Act No. 245/2008).<sup>14</sup> Consequently, in May 2023 the legal entitlement to admission to pre-primary education in kindergarten was established so that any child who reaches the age of 4 by 31 August 2024 and every child who reaches the age of 3 by 31 August 2025 has a legal right to a place in a kindergarten established by a municipality or self-governing region (Act No. 182/2023, amending the Act No. 245/2008).<sup>15</sup>

114. The MoE SR has developed a plan of the "Preventing early school leaving through an early warning system and targeted support in the guidance and prevention system" project which fulfils the priorities of the following programmes of the Recovery and Resilience Plan, Programme Slovakia and the Action Plan of the Priority Area Education for the Strategy 2030.

115. Detailed information about projects in this field are in the Annex.

#### *Measures to combat segregation*

116. There have also been significant changes to education laws. For example, the Education Act has been repeatedly amended and has undergone changes from integral to inclusive education, the prohibition of segregation and the introduction of compulsory pre-primary education. Changes have also been made to the Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on Teaching Staff and Professional Staff and on amendments to certain acts, as amended, and to the Act No. 596/2003 Coll. on State Administration in Education and School Self-Government and on amendments to certain acts, and to the Act No. 597/2003 Coll. on the Financing of Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and School Establishments, as amended.

117. Detailed information about projects to combat segregation can be found in the Annex.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2019/209/20210101> (in Slovak).

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2023/182/20230901> (in Slovak).

## Gender equality

### Reply to paragraph 10

#### *Strategic framework documents in the field of equality between women and men*

118. The Slovak Government approved the Equality Strategy and the Action Plan for Equality between Women and Men and Equal Opportunities for 2021–2027. The documents were developed by the MoLSAF SR and their content is based on international human rights documents, recommendations of UN human rights committees and the EU Strategy for Equality between Women and Men.

119. The Equality Strategy sets out key policy objectives and actions in these areas: dignity and physical integrity; work life balance; education, science and research; equal opportunities and access to the labour market; women's economic dependence and poverty; political and economic participation; participation in decision-making; ensuring participatory mechanisms to promote gender equality; institutional arrangements for gender equality; inclusion of vulnerable groups; multiple discrimination against women and minor children/girls; international development cooperation and humanitarian aid. With the adoption of those two documents, Slovakia has committed itself to taking positive measures aimed at achieving gender equality and equal opportunities.

120. The MoLSAF SR has also adopted a strategic document – the National Action Plan for Women's Employment for 2022–2030. This Action Plan is the first of its kind and contains measures that aim to achieve the following objectives:

- Reducing inequalities between women and men;
- Strengthening women's economic independence and economic empowerment;
- Reducing the income gap between women and men to bring the SR as close as possible to the EU average;
- Creating society-wide conditions for improving the work life balance.

121. The National Action Plan also responds to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, as well as to the situation caused by the war in Ukraine and the influx of refugees, especially women and children, in Slovakia. It develops individual measures under three strategic areas:

- Legislative measures;
- Improving women's access to the labour market and achieving work life balance;
- Improving women's educational opportunities and their skills.

122. In the strategic area of “work life balance”, the objective is set to strengthen women's economic independence and, as a direct consequence, their economic empowerment. At the same time, the strategic area aims to reduce the income gap between women and men to the EU average, while taking measures to eliminate it altogether. In addition to the above-stated, the aim of this area is to create society-wide conditions to achieve work life balance, and to set up a system capable of responding flexibly and taking measures that reflect the needs of women in crisis situations.

123. In the area of “equal opportunities and access to the labour market, women's economic independence and poverty”, the MoLSAF SR promotes the strengthening of women's economic independence and the elimination of the causes leading to women's poverty.

124. The GEC is the expert body for gender equality issues and for monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, other international human rights conventions, legislation and EU strategic objectives in this area.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.mpsvr.sk/sk/vybor-pre-rodovu-rovnost/> (in Slovak).

125. As a participatory body, the GEC ensures multi-institutional cooperation between public administration institutions and the non-governmental sector. It collaborates in the drafting of strategic documents and reports on the implementation of the tasks of government documents (e.g. National Strategy for Equality between Women and Men; National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women; Report on the State of Gender Equality; etc.). It contributes to the mutual exchange of information on projects implemented in the particular field.

## **Violence against women and girls, including domestic violence**

### **Reply to paragraph 11**

#### *Strategic framework documents on the prevention and elimination of violence against women*

126. The *National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women 2022–2027* provides a coordinated approach to all forms of violence against women at the national level.<sup>17</sup> The Action Plan is a strategic framework document for the implementation of the policy for the prevention and elimination of violence against women in the SR. It is an implementation document in four priority areas: protection of women experiencing violence and their children; prevention of violence against women; integrated policies and data collection and effective punishment of violence against women. The Action Plan is developed into concrete tasks.

127. Under the priority area Protection of women experiencing violence and of their children, a concept for funding reform is currently being prepared, which will be a national strategic document defining the basic changes to the system of financing social services. The concept will be in line with the international instruments which the SR is bound by or which it has accepted in order to provide for the fundamental and social human rights as defined either by the Slovak Constitution or by regional and international organisations.

128. As the sponsor, the MoH SR is implementing individual tasks of the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women for 2022–2027, namely:

- Task No. 2.10: Revision of the professional guideline on the procedure of health care professionals in providing health care to women at risk of violence:
  - The professional guideline was revised in 2022 on the basis of the expert opinions of the main Slovak experts for special areas (e.g. gynaecology and obstetrics, general medicine, emergency medicine, surgery, psychiatry, etc.). At the same time, the contact details of the Information Offices for Victims of Crime and their detached offices have been added to a special guideline;
- Task No. 2.11: Update of the professional guideline of the MoH SR on the symptoms and diagnosing of neglect, torture or abuse of a minor and on the procedure of health care providers in reporting suspected neglect, torture or abuse of a minor:
  - The professional guideline has been professionally revised in 2022 in cooperation with the Chief Emergency Medicine Specialist of the MoH SR.<sup>18</sup>

129. The MoH SR fully supports undergraduate and postgraduate training for health care professionals and experts focusing on violence prevention as well as the development of ethical and social aspects in the provision of health care. Health care professionals receive training on generally applicable legislation relevant to the exercise of their profession, including information on the criminal liability of health care professionals during their studies. As a part of this training, they also receive information on the prohibition of torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, but separate or special training on the provisions of the Convention is not established in the SR.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.employment.gov.sk/files/sk/ministerstvo/spolocny-sekretariat-vyborov/vybor-rodovu-rovnost/dokumenty-udalosti/nap-eliminacia-nasilia-zenach.pdf> (in Slovak).

<sup>18</sup> The updated document was published in the Bulletin of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, issues 7–11 of March 2, 2023, volume 71.

*Methodological, educational and research activities in the field of violence against women and domestic violence*

130. In 2023 the LFRI published the *Methodology for Understanding Key Concepts and Theories on Domestic Violence and Sexualized Violence Against Women*. The aim of this methodology is to focus on the protection of victims of domestic violence and the so-called sexualized violence from secondary and repeated victimization. The methodology applies the principle that the protection of victims is only possible on the basis of an interdisciplinary approach and requires multi-institutional cooperation. Otherwise, it is not possible to identify the harm that has occurred and, therefore, the needs that the victim has. In the field of education, an online course on domestic violence was developed in 2022 and published in 2023.

131. The CMC carried out two educational events on the topic in 2022: *The situation of women and children facing gender-based violence*. In 2022, the CMC also implemented the “CSA” Training Programme on sexual abuse for male and female staff at the Centres for Children and Families. The participants of the programme gained knowledge about the phenomenon, its prevention, identification, crisis intervention and also the possibilities of mediating further support for the survivors and those at risk. In 2023 the CMC continued to organize further training for public administration staff through the exchange of experiences and best practices. The aim of the training was to promote the provision of qualified assistance and to strengthen a non-victimizing approach, which are prerequisites for an effective protection against gender-based violence.

132. In 2023 the CMC also developed and published online training in the form of e-learning courses. Such training is intended for the professional public, especially for the so-called helping professions that come into contact with the victims of violence against women and domestic violence.<sup>19</sup>

133. Within the framework of multi-institutional cooperation LFRI – CMC in cooperation with other entities – MoI SR, the PJGC, APF and the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies implemented the project Improving the Protection of the Rights of Victims – *Strengthening the Capacities and Procedures for Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*. The participating institutions cooperate in both training and research activities. In 2022 the work of multi-institutional cooperation partnerships (MICP) continued within the CMC. Draft Regional Action Plans for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women were published as a result of the MICPs’<sup>20</sup> activities for all regions of Slovakia except for the Košice Self-Governing Region.

*Strategic framework documents in the field of protection of children from violence*

134. In 2014–2023 the NCC coordinated the implementation of the National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Violence<sup>21</sup> in accordance with the Resolution of the Slovak Government No. 24 of 15 January 2014. On 13 November 2023 the new National Strategy and the Action Plan based on the National Strategy AP were adopted by the Resolution of the Slovak Government No. 594.

135. Children were also involved in the preparation and production of both materials in a participatory way. The five pillars of the National Strategy include: support for the protection of children from violence, the child as part of society, prevention of all forms of institutional violence, the rights of children at risk, and support for education and scientific research activities in the field of protection of children from violence. The horizontal principles of the National Strategy include: participation, awareness-raising, prevention and multidisciplinary cooperation.

136. In the National Strategy AP there are several strategic objectives with calls and specific tasks, with assigned sponsors and co-sponsors.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.zastavmenasilie.gov.sk/o-nas/kmc/> (in Slovak).

<sup>20</sup> [www.ivpr.gov.sk](http://www.ivpr.gov.sk) and [www.zastavmenasilie.gov.sk](http://www.zastavmenasilie.gov.sk) (in Slovak).

<sup>21</sup> [https://detstvobeznasilia.gov.sk/web\\_data/content/upload/subsubsub/1/2019-aktualizacia-narodnej-strategie-na-ochranu-deti-pred-nasilim-1.pdf](https://detstvobeznasilia.gov.sk/web_data/content/upload/subsubsub/1/2019-aktualizacia-narodnej-strategie-na-ochranu-deti-pred-nasilim-1.pdf) (in Slovak).

137. Strategic Objective 1 – *Promoting the protection of children from violence*, the following tasks have been set: promotion and development of competences for the purpose of coordinating multidisciplinary solutions to the problem of violence against children at the national and regional level; strengthening the position and competences of the coordinator for the protection of children from violence; clarification of the powers, authorisations and obligations of the cooperating entities – effective cooperation, cooperation in the implementation of international documents and cooperation with international organisations in the field of the protection of children from violence and respecting the rights of the child; creation of a positive climate and safe environment for children – safeguarding (in all institutions, at formally organized events); education of children about the identification of violence and correct responses to violence; creation of contact points for children to report violence (enabling children to report the cases of violence, in child-friendly conditions); preparation of the professional public to receive a report of violence from a child.

138. In the Strategic Objective 3 – *Preventing all forms of institutional violence*, the following tasks have been defined: improving the children's access to the justice system and the system of protection of children from violence; making the legislative and non-legislative materials (concerning them) comprehensible for children; and building comprehensive assistance houses (Barnahus).

139. In the Strategic Objective 4 – *Rights of the children at risk*: creation and/or support of crisis response teams at the regional level; linking public and professional representatives to address the necessary systemic changes to satisfy the best interests of minors in the field of mental health; promotion and development of innovative methods in the work with children in different life situations at the national and regional level (streetwork, clubwork and peer programmes; low-threshold programmes for children and youth, volunteer programmes ...).

140. In the period under review, the NCC cooperated intensively in the implementation of the tasks arising from the work of the Lanzarote Committee and ensured communication with the Secretariat of the Lanzarote Committee and continuously cooperated with the Permanent Mission of the SR to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

*Measures to detect and effectively prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence offences*

141. Based on the statutory competence of the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the Slovak Republic regulated in the Act No. 153/2001 Coll. on the Public Prosecutor's Office, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the "Act No. 153/2001"), the substantive competence of the GP SR is defined in the area of prosecution of persons suspected of committing criminal offences and supervision of the observance of legality prior to the commencement of criminal prosecution and in the area of participation in the elimination of the causes and conditions of criminal activity, in the prevention and suppression of crime.

142. Since 2013 the detection and effective prosecution of perpetrators of domestic violence offences has been one of the most important priorities of activities of the prosecutor's office. Criminal prosecutions brought for crimes of domestic violence and sexual violence are given high attention not only by the acting (supervising) prosecutors, but also by superior prosecutors. This is highlighted by the supervision of the superior prosecutor's offices over the criminal proceedings conducted for the above-mentioned crimes, in the form of reporting on such criminal proceedings to the GP SR, which allows for subsequent generalisation of the acquired knowledge and guidance of the prosecutors' activities.

143. In 2013 a domestic violence specialisation of prosecutors was established within the Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic. Within the specialisation, specialist prosecutors also deal with crimes of a sexually motivated violent nature, or violence in general in partner and other family relationships. Such specialist prosecutors work at all levels of the prosecution service. Each district and regional prosecutor's office has at least one specialist prosecutor for this type of crime. The number of specialist prosecutors is increasing as a result of the increase in domestic violence. The number of specialist prosecutors at the GP SR has increased from two (in 2016) to the current four. The specialisation allows specialist prosecutors to receive regular and long-term training and to deal more deeply with this specific, evidence-intensive type of crime.

144. The detection and clarification of domestic violence crimes has continuously increased since 2015 (e.g. in 2015, 211 criminal prosecutions were conducted against specific individuals, in 2016, 245 criminal prosecutions were conducted, which is an increase of 13.8%).<sup>22</sup> Until then, there had been stagnation or even a decline in criminal proceedings, which was also contributed to by the activities of prosecutors-specialists in the field of prevention and education. The GP SR conducts regular working meetings, trainings (in cooperation with the JA SR) and workshops for specialist prosecutors on the issue of proving psychological aspects and consequences of domestic violence and on the issue of crimes committed through electronic means, specifically also dangerous stalking, blackmailing or sexual abuse. The GP SR also carried out training activities specifically aimed at preparing trainee public prosecutors for the performance of the prosecutor's function, with the area of domestic violence being an integral part of the training.

145. Prosecutors of the GP SR also act as lecturers in the JA SR, and between 2016 and 2024 they lectured a number of training activities intended for judges, prosecutors, senior court officials or trainee public prosecutors, which were specifically focused on the issue of domestic violence and the issue of particularly vulnerable victims and access to them in criminal proceedings.

146. A specific and unprecedented situation occurred in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The GP SR was the first institution in the SR to draw early attention to the issue of domestic violence and its increase through media, following the measures taken to prevent the spread of this disease. The measures taken to manage the pandemic (in particular the sudden and drastic closure of the country and its functioning, etc.) caused the previously existing preconditions for domestic violence in the family (violent, explosive nature, worse social conditions, use of alcohol or other addictive substances), which may not have been manifested before, to become more exposed and contributed to the emergence of situations that were already clearly cases of domestic violence.

147. In such a situation, it was necessary to take measures to inform the public about the possible impact of the above-stated measures on potential situations of domestic violence. Regular media coverage was carried out in the electronic and print media and on social networks. The above-mentioned activities led to higher reporting of this crime, while after a decline in the number of notifications in the first month of the pandemic, there has been an increase in the number of notifications of up to 30%. The issue of domestic violence was repeatedly brought to attention in this way throughout the pandemic and the duration of anti-pandemic measures.

148. Close and continuous cooperation between the prosecutor's office and the bodies responsible for this issue (public authorities, organisations set up by them and the non-governmental sector) is also important in the fight against domestic violence and violence against women. In this way, the Slovak Public Prosecutor's Office cooperates with the MoI SR (especially in the field of crime prevention), with the PF SR (mutual educational activities), with the MoLSAF SR (implementation of tasks resulting from the relevant action plans), with the MoJ SR (proposals for legislative changes aimed at improving activities in the fight against domestic violence and violence against women), with the NCC (participation in the implementation of tasks resulting from plans and strategies approved by the Slovak Government in the field of combating violence against children), but also e.g. with the CMC.

*Adequate access of the victims of violence to protection and assistance*

149. The establishment of the free line for the victims of torture at the GP SR, which enabled not only victims, but also relatives, acquaintances or other persons to report that the so-called domestic violence was taking place in their immediate vicinity, contributed to an increase in the number of criminal proceedings since 2015. The line enabled the prosecutor's office and the police to take lawful measures promptly. Information was received in two forms – as a free-of-charge telephone line for tortured persons which was used by prosecutors

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.genpro.gov.sk/spravy-o-cinnosti/sprava/sprava-generalneho-prokuratora-slovenskej-republiky-o-cinnosti-prokuratury-v-roku-2016-a-poznatkoch-prokuratury-o-stave-zakonnosti-v-slovenskej-republike/> (in Slovak).

at regional prosecutor's offices, and as an e-mail line which was used by prosecutors of the Criminal Department of the GP SR who promptly forwarded the received reports to the relevant prosecutor's office for action. The telephone and e-mail lines operated from 2015 to 2021. They were abolished after an evaluation of their effectiveness, which was declining due to the establishment of other operational methods of reporting domestic violence which were more widely used.

150. On 1 January 2023, mutual cooperation and exchange of information between the specialised intervention centres and the information offices administered by the MoI SR was laid down in legislation. The information offices respect the status and roles of the intervention centres, while the aim of the cooperation is to ensure that the victims of domestic violence are promptly brought to the system of specialised professional assistance. The information offices provide information to victims of crime and other antisocial activities within the scope of the right to information provided for in a specific regulation; this also includes information on victims' rights, including the right to compensation for the victims of violent crimes and the provision of specialist services.

151. In 2021 the Act No. 274/2017 was amended with effect from 1 July 2021, which fundamentally changed the philosophy of compensation for victims of violent crimes. A key change is the introduction of the possibility for a victim of a violent crime to ask the MoJ SR for compensation already after the initiation of criminal prosecution. The previous legislation allowed the victims of a crime to ask for compensation only after the final conclusion of the criminal proceedings. The MoJ SR as the decision-making body decides on the entitlement to redress and the specific amount paid out upon written request from the victim of a violent crime. At the same time, access to professional assistance for the victims of crimes has also been simplified through the establishment of intervention centres.

152. Intervention centres for victims of domestic violence are entities that have been accredited by the MoJ SR for the provision of specialised professional assistance to the victims of domestic violence and can also be registered as an "intervention centre" pursuant to the Act No. 274/2017, in particular after proving that they have fulfilled the condition of 5 years of experience in providing assistance to the victims of domestic violence. The intervention centres for the victims of domestic violence were established starting from January 2022, with 1 intervention centre in each region (with the exception of the Košice Region with 3 intervention centres which have divided their scope of activities according to individual districts).

153. The main task of an intervention centre is to provide proactive professional assistance to the victims of domestic violence by contacting the victim within 72 hours after receiving a copy of an official report and offering professional assistance. A victim of domestic violence may also contact the intervention centre directly even without reporting the violent person and the intervention centre will provide the necessary professional assistance (no criminal complaint or criminal proceedings are necessary).

154. Furthermore, intervention centres in particular:

- Provide crisis intervention;
- Provide an assessment of the threat of danger to life or health;
- Provide legal and psychological assistance;
- Mediate the provision of social services in emergency housing; and
- Specialised social counselling; ensure a coordinated procedure for the provision of assistance.

155. Intervention centres provide assistance to the victims of domestic violence free of charge. The MoJ SR provides financial support to at least 1 intervention centre in each region. The financial support is provided on the basis of a subsidy which is bound to 1 financial year. The estimated amount of the subsidy for all intervention centres is EUR 1.6 million per year.

156. Intervention centres collect data on the number of women, children and men as victims of domestic violence, i.e. on the clients to whom they provide professional assistance, on the

basis of reporting or on the victim's own initiative. In 2022 they provided assistance and support to a total of 1,375 women and in 2023 they provided assistance to 1,930 women.

*Impact of the Victims of Crime Act*

157. Under the Act No. 274/2017 the law enforcement authorities are obliged to provide the victim with the necessary information in an understandable manner upon first contact, including information on entities providing assistance to victims, contact details of such entities and the form of professional assistance that can be provided to the victim. They also inform victims of their options for urgent medical care, access to legal aid, conditions under which protection is provided if they are faced with danger to life and health or the threat of serious property damage, the right to interpretation and translation, measures to protect their interests which may be requested if they reside in another member state and procedures for seeking redress if their rights have been violated by law enforcement authorities within criminal proceedings.

158. The GP SR also participated in the preparation of the Act No. 274/2017. After the adoption of such Act, the GP SR conducted several educational activities for police officers and prosecutors aimed at clarifying the individual institutes in criminal proceedings, their importance and the need for strict compliance with them in order to protect the victims of crime. Specific attention is paid to the approach to particularly vulnerable victims in preparatory proceedings, namely sensitising persons coming into contact with them, in order to prevent causing secondary victimisation. During the period under review, the GP SR, as an entity obliged to provide its opinion, exercised its legislative competence in the legislative procedure concerning criminal law measures to combat violence against women and minors, including domestic violence. A list of such activities is annexed.

159. Following the adoption of the Act No. 274/2017, law enforcement authorities within the scope of powers of the PF SR apply special procedures when interrogating particularly vulnerable victims of crimes under the Code of Criminal Procedure. These include e.g. a sensitive and empathetic approach to the victim, cooperation with a psychologist when conducting the interrogation, as well as avoiding direct contact between the victim and the perpetrator during the performance of the acts of criminal proceedings, which is also related to the introduction of the use of the so-called SIR. At present, the PF SR has established 17 SIRs within projects, including 2 SIRs for victims of trafficking in human beings. Other 8 rooms shall be operational at the end of April 2024.

160. A legislative amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure in 2024 modified the conditions in the provisions of Section 135 for the interrogation of the following persons:

- A witness who is a child;
- A witness who is a particularly vulnerable victim and his/her family member pursuant to the Act No. 274/2017;
- A witness whose age is unknown and who there is reason to believe that he/she is younger than 18, until proven otherwise;
- A witness about matters which, in view of his/her personal characteristics, relationship to the accused or the suspect, dependence on the accused or the suspect, or the nature and circumstances of the commission of the offence, could adversely affect his/her mental integrity or expose him/her to the risk of secondary victimisation, when revived in his/her memory.

161. The interrogation of the persons referred to above is carried out in the following manner:

- Using video-conferencing equipment;
- In a particularly considerate and substantive manner so that he/she need not repeat the same things in subsequent criminal proceedings;
- Questions may be asked only through a law enforcement authority;

- Re-interrogation of the witness in pre-trial proceedings may be conducted only with the consent of the public prosecutor, while the re-interrogation is normally conducted by the same person;
- In the proceedings before the court, evidence obtained by interrogating the witness may be taken only by reading the minutes of the witness's interrogation.

162. In 2021 the time limit for eviction from the common dwelling was extended from 10 days to 14 days. This legislative change also extended the territorial effect of the prohibition to approach the person at risk to 50 metres (from the previous 10 metres).

163. In January 2017 the use of a new method for estimating the risk in the form of a questionnaire for estimating the risk of endangerment was introduced in the conduct of service interventions in cases of domestic violence, and it was updated in 2019 and supplemented with a methodology for its use. The PF SR has also developed a "*Methodology of Police Procedure in Domestic Violence Cases*" which was updated in 2023 in line with the requirements of the protection of victims from secondary and repeated victimisation. In cooperation with partners, the MoI SR also produced a brochure called "*Domestic Violence*" for the public in 2020.<sup>23</sup> The EU Directive on combating violence against women will be transposed into Slovak law by 2027.

## Sexual and reproductive rights

### Reply to paragraph 12

#### *Measures in the area of illegal sterilization of Roma women*

164. In September 2021 the MoJ SR together with the MoH SR set up a working group on the subject with the aim of examining the circumstances under which sterilization may have occurred in the periods in question, as well as the possibility of financial compensation for the victims. The working group also dealt with the preparation of a compensation mechanism (legislative plan for a compensation mechanism).

#### *Measures taken in the field of sexual and reproductive health*

165. Sexual and reproductive health care is provided through a programme of prevention, including education and screenings, antenatal checks, antenatal care, delivery and postnatal care. Prevention is carried out on the basis of the provisions of the Annex 2 to the Act No. 577/2004 Coll. on the Scope of Healthcare Reimbursed under Public Health Insurance and on the Reimbursement for Services Related to the Provision of Healthcare and Diagnostic Examinations, Treatment, Dispensation, Spa Care and Medical Rehabilitation, as amended. It covers all ages from birth, through childhood, adolescence, reproductive age to old age.

166. The MoH SR considers the area of protection and promotion of women's and mothers' reproductive health as a priority. Despite the fact that the SR does not have a comprehensive programme on sexual and reproductive health and rights, the MoH continuously develops proposals for the principal directions of the state health policy and develops them in the light of the current legislation of the SR as well as approved non-legislative documents of the Slovak Government.

167. In the field of processes aimed at promoting women's reproductive health and safe motherhood, we mention in particular:

- Accredited study programme of continuous education in the health professions of nurse, midwife and doctor: "Preparation of a professional lactation consultant";<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.minv.sk/?brozury-a-letaky> (in Slovak).

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.health.gov.sk/?zoznam-akreditovanych-studijnych-programov-dalsieho-vzdelavania-zdravotnickych-pracovnikov> (in Slovak).

- Standard procedure for the performance of prevention: Maternal and newborn care according to the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) principles of promoting relational bonding and lactation<sup>25</sup> (BFHI Standard Practice);
- Introduction of an initial and continuous internal evaluation of health care facilities in the form of an on-line questionnaire which hospitals send to the MoH SR on an ongoing basis;
- Introduction of the recording of sentinel indicators on breastfeeding in the newborn's medical record and inclusion of such data in the legal framework for data collection in the National Health Information Centre;
- Establishment of a legal quality tool to verify compliance with the BFHI Standard Procedure;
- The MoH SR ensures multi-year implementation of the women's reproductive health promotion project under the BCA Biennial Agreement between the MoH SR and WHO. The aim of the project is to develop and provide the basis for the creation of a professional medical tool – an evidence-based policy document for the treatment of patients with infertility using standard diagnostic and therapeutic procedures for the treatment of infertility with the method of restorative reproductive medicine, and to increase access to health care in the treatment of infertility of couples;
- In the context of supporting the development of health care aimed at promoting women's reproductive health and safe motherhood, the MoH SR, in connection with the Programme Slovakia, has developed a plan for a National Project;
- The MoH SR is currently working on another plan for a National Project – multidisciplinary teams of psychosocial assistance and crisis intervention aimed at helping the mother/parent in case of stillbirth or identification of any risk to child development or medical diagnosis related to health disadvantage.

168. Further development of health care aimed at promoting and protecting women's reproductive health, safe motherhood, and preserving and restoring women's and mothers' health is evident in a number of approved national programmes and plans:

- Slovak Government Resolution No. 223/2021 on the Action Plan for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities for 2021–2027 to the National Strategy for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities in the Slovak Republic for 2021–2027;
- Slovak Government Resolution No. 244/2023 of 24 May 2023 on the Action Plan for 2023–2025 to the National Strategy for the Development of Coordinated Early Intervention and Early Care Services 2022–2030;<sup>26</sup>
- The development of health care focused on women's reproductive health and safe motherhood is also reflected in the internal regulations of the MoH SR – Gynaecology and Obstetrics Standards SPDTP.<sup>27</sup>

169. In the period under review, the MoH SR partially covered important and necessary topics in the area of women's health care, safe motherhood and reproductive health.

#### *Access to safe abortion and contraception*

170. The MoH SR ensures access to abortion (safe abortion) in accordance with the Act No. 73/1986 Coll. on Abortion, as amended. Abortion is carried out in institutional health facilities based on a written request of the woman, due to the woman's medical indication or a detected congenital developmental defect of the child, or up to the 12th week of pregnancy if the woman submits a written request and if her health condition permits it.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.standardnepostupy.sk/standardy-bfhi/> (in Slovak).

<sup>26</sup> <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Resolution/20867/1> (in Slovak).

<sup>27</sup> [www.standardnepostupy.sk](http://www.standardnepostupy.sk) (in Slovak).

171. Contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancy are not covered by public health insurance in the SR. Today, health insurance companies reimburse them to patients who are prescribed them by a doctor for medical reasons.

**Prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, or excessive use of force**

**Reply to paragraph 13**

*Measures to strengthen the Control and Inspection Service Department*

172. On 1 February 2019 the ISO was established to take over the tasks of the former Control and Inspection Service Section of the MoI SR. The ISO is a separate component of the PF SR with jurisdiction over the entirety of Slovakia for the purposes of exposing, investigating and conducting expedited investigations of crimes committed by members of the armed security corps, i.e. members of the PF SR and PJGC. Since 1 January 2020, the investigation and expedited investigation of criminal offences by members of the financial administration has also been within the competence of the ISO. It also performs tasks in the field of inspection activities at the MoI SR.

173. The ISO is managed by its Director who is responsible to the Slovak Government for the performance of his /her duties. The Director of the ISO is appointed by the Slovak Government on the proposal of the Minister of the Interior of the Slovak Republic; however, before submitting the proposal for appointment of the candidate for the position of the Director of the ISO to the Slovak Government, the Minister of the Interior of the Slovak Republic proposes the candidate for the position of the Director of the ISO to the Committee of the NC SR for Defence and Security for a public hearing.

174. This legislative change significantly strengthened the independence of the ISO which is included in the structure of the MoI SR, but the MoI SR ensures its activities only in terms of personnel, financial, and material and technical aspects.

175. The investigators of the PF SR assigned to the ISO are procedurally independent in the matters they investigate, and in their activities they are bound by the Constitution, constitutional laws, acts, other generally binding legal regulations and international treaties which the SR is bound by. To the extent provided for by the Code of Criminal Procedure, the investigators are also bound by the instructions and orders of the prosecutor and the court. A prosecutor conducts supervision over compliance with the law prior to criminal prosecution and in pretrial proceedings. Every decision issued by an investigator of the PF SR at the ISO in the matter itself is reviewed by the relevant prosecutor's office.

*Measures related to the intervention in the Budulovská settlement in Moldava nad Bodvou*

176. In connection with the intervention in the Budulovská settlement in Moldava nad Bodvou, we would like to state that, an investigation is currently being conducted at the Inspection Service Department of the ISO. On 3 March, 2023 pursuant to the provisions of the Criminal Code, criminal prosecution was reopened for the offences of the crime of abuse of authority of a public official by so far unidentified members of the PF SR, the crime of violation of domestic liberty, the crime of bodily harm, and the crime of torture and other inhuman or cruel treatment (see point 23).

177. The investigation is focused on a possible racial motive for carrying out or planning the search operation 100 in Budulovská in Moldava nad Bodvou on 19 June 2013.

*Training of law enforcement officers on the prevention of torture and ill-treatment*

178. As a part of their duty assignment, police officers are regularly retrained on legal standards and internal regulations governing the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms, and are also familiarised with the tasks of preventing violations of human rights and freedoms by police officers when carrying out duty interventions and restricting personal liberty. All members of the PF SR are also regularly trained about the provisions of the Code of Ethics of the Police Force members of the Slovak Republic and the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The

training is targeted at the regulations governing the fundamental human rights and freedoms of persons, in particular in relation to the non-tolerance of violence and any form of ill-treatment of persons deprived of their liberty, with a particular emphasis on the appropriateness of the use of coercive means. Rigorous training is provided not only in theory but also in practice during the training sessions conducted.

179. Within international cooperation, members of the PF SR have participated in several training courses:

- NATIONAL POLICE FORCES, organized by the CE in Odessa, Ukraine;
- A seminar for police officers in Bratislava focused on the investigation of racial crimes, organised in cooperation with the RCGP and the CE;
- TAHCLE training programme – training for law enforcement authorities on combating hate crimes.

#### *Measures in the field of national legislation*

180. As for the prevention of torture, in 2023 the MoJ SR focused on the legislative processes related to the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the establishment of the NPM. The possible amendment and modification of the definition of torture as a criminal offence, with a possible proposal to define the offence of other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, will be the subject of a discussion on the forthcoming amendment to the Criminal Code. However, this task is not included in the Slovak Government's Legislative Task Plan for 2024.

181. According to the approved GPS, the aim is to take concrete measures aimed at humanising the conditions of detention and imprisonment in accordance with international and European recommendations on the prevention of torture. Such measures should focus particularly on the individualisation of the way in which sentences are served, the development of re-socialisation and educational programmes and the elimination of the negative effects of the prison environment.

### **Treatment of persons deprived of their liberty and conditions of detention**

#### **Reply to paragraph 14**

182. In practice, every detainee is instructed of their rights, including the right of immediate access to a lawyer from the very beginning of the deprivation of their personal liberty, and their right to legal assistance beginning at initial interrogation, their right to immediate access to an independent and free-of-charge medical examination and their right to notify a family member or other person of their own choosing of the deprivation of their liberty without undue delay under applicable provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Persons deprived of personal freedom are provided with their rights in written form and confirm receipt with their signature in the minutes recording deprivation of personal liberty. A person deprived of personal liberty may have such written information on their person at all times until they are released or remanded into custody.

183. Within the scope of powers of the PPF SR, a service manual for law enforcement authorities entitled "Models for Police Officers in Criminal Proceedings" has been drawn up and it also includes a model "Instruction on the Rights of the Accused" as well as a model "Instruction on the Rights of the Suspect".

184. The Criminal Police Department of the PPF SR secures translation of the instructions for accused and suspected persons into 24 languages (*English, Arabic, Bulgarian, Czech, Chinese, Finnish, French, Greek, Dutch, Croatian, Macedonian, Hungarian, German, Polish, Romani, Romanian, Russian, Slovenian, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish, Italian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese*) which are the most commonly spoken by accused or suspected persons in Slovakia. The translation of instructions is ensured from a central level so that the police officer of each department conducting the investigation or abbreviated investigation can provide this instruction to the aforementioned persons without undue delay.

185. A part of the measures taken by the PJGC to improve material conditions in prisons and cells, it has been possible to create, renovate and aestheticize the conditions of detention and areas for the treatment of prisoners in several areas. In this context, walking yards have been modified; workout playgrounds and sports facilities are gradually being built; telephone facilities have been increased by 41%; the establishment and retrofitting of multifunctional and therapeutic rooms and specialized treatment departments has been modified; the book collection of individual institutions has been changed and supplemented; cells and rooms have been furnished with elements from the natural environment; the use of Biofeedback instrumentation has been introduced to determine the stress profile of a prisoner.

186. Furthermore, it was possible to set up workshops in the institute in Ilava, to provide automatic translators for communication with prisoners, to offer a Slovak language course for foreign detainees, to adapt and equip the premises for carrying out searches of prisoners in such a way that the human dignity and privacy of the person is respected, to provide education for illiterate persons, to set up self-service kitchens and to enable keeping of a contact animal; to set up and to equip materially the so-called exit wings in each institution. Legislative changes were also introduced.

### **Treatment of foreigners, including refugees and asylum seekers**

#### **Reply to paragraph 15**

187. Alternatives to detention were introduced into Act No. 404/2011 Coll. by transposing European legislation into the Slovak legal order (*note: the Return Directive was partially transposed into Act No. 48/2002 Coll. on the Residence of Foreigners and on Amendments to Certain Acts, as amended, on 1 December 2009 and fully transposed on 22 November 2011 by the adoption of Act No. 404/2011 Coll.*). In the monitored period, Act No. 404/2011 Coll. transposed Directive 2016/801 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, vocational training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pair activities and Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment and repealing Council Directive 2009/50/EC. In accordance with the relevant provision of Act No. 404/2011 Coll., the police department acting in the matter of administrative expulsion may impose on a third-country national the obligation to report his/her residence or to lodge a financial guarantee instead of detention (a financial guarantee may also be lodged by a person close to the third-country national). The specific conditions for imposing one of the detention alternatives are regulated by the provisions of Section 89 of Act No. 404/2011 Coll.

188. In the area of prioritisation of alternatives to detention, the administrative authorities deciding on detention always assess the availability, effectiveness and suitability of alternatives to detention on a case-by-case basis and, as far as the circumstances allow, priority is always given to the alternative of detaining persons instead of placing them in police detention units for foreigners.

189. Where it is not possible to use a non-custodial alternative to detention, family and children are always detained and placed together in the appropriate police detention unit for foreigners, unless there are serious reasons for separating them. Families with children may be detained and placed in a facility for a maximum period of 6 months; this period cannot be extended in the case of families with children.

190. The facility where a family with children is placed takes into account the needs of minors, not only in terms of the equipment (e.g. a playroom, playground, gym, library...), but also in terms of child-oriented activities (provision of outdoor activities, cultural activities, education...).

191. Numerous legislative and non-legislative measures have been taken in connection with the influx of refugees due to the outbreak of the military conflict in Ukraine. More detailed information is provided in the Annex.

192. Procedural guarantees are provided to identified vulnerable persons in the framework of ongoing asylum procedures as well as temporary shelter procedures carried out by the MO

MoI SR. They are provided on an individual basis, based on the identified needs of the particular person.

193. With regard to the introduction of a special procedure for determining statelessness, we would like to point out that a stateless person is understood as a third-country national according to the provisions of the Section 2(4) of the Act No. 404/2011:

- Stateless persons have the possibility to obtain permanent residence in the territory of the SR. The MoI SR may grant permanent residence to a stateless person for five years even without fulfilling the conditions laid down in the Act No. 404/2011, even repeatedly;
- A stateless person is a person who is not considered by any state to be its citizen under its laws. To prove this fact, it is sufficient if they prove that they do not have the nationality of the state:
  - in which they were born;
  - in which they had their previous domicile or residence; and
  - in which their parents and siblings are nationals.

### **Access to justice, independence of the judiciary and fair trial**

#### **Reply to paragraph 16**

194. During the period under review, there was a major reform of the judicial map; it established municipal courts, changed the causal jurisdiction in specific agendas in the regional courts and launched new administrative courts.

195. The increase in the size of the judicial districts should mean that more judges in the district will be able to specialise in one type of the agenda, namely civil, commercial, criminal and family agenda. A specialised judge is more familiar with his/her area of expertise, which implies a better and faster decision.

196. In the cases provided for by law, a citizen may file a petition for the initiation of proceedings at the nearest court office, also at the seat of the court. A party will be able to attend hearings and other court proceedings at the seat of the court as well as at the court's place of work. It will also be possible to hold a hearing at the place of a different public authority. In civil matters, online hearings will also be possible. A party will be able to participate from any place with an online connection and a screen.

### **Eradication of slavery, servitude and human trafficking**

#### **Reply to paragraph 17**

##### *Measures to combat trafficking in human beings*

197. The Slovak Government has approved three strategies in the area of systematic and effective combatting of trafficking in human beings, namely the *National Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for 2015–2018*, the *National Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for 2019–2023* and the most recent, the sixth in the order, the *National Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for the years 2024–2028*.

198. Each strategic material included and includes a set of tasks/measures to which the Slovak Government has committed itself and which reflect the recommendations of the monitoring mechanisms for combating trafficking in human beings and the needs of the application practice. The tasks/measures are aimed at early identification of the victims of trafficking in human beings and their access to assistance and support, streamlining national stakeholder communication to refer the victims of trafficking to appropriate providers of services for the victims of trafficking, and detecting and investigating the crimes of trafficking in human beings. At the same time, awareness raising and sensitization of the general and professional public is also a part of the tasks/measures.

199. In the period under review, the internal regulation of the MoI SR on the provision of a specialised *Programme of support and protection of the victims of trafficking in human beings* was also amended. The programme includes pre-return assistance, assisted voluntary return, crisis care and reintegration/integration into society, in particular through the provision of social assistance services, social counselling, psychological counselling, legal counselling and health care. For the purposes of the assistance programme, a victim is defined as a Slovak citizen, an EU citizen or a third-country national who is reasonably suspected of having been a victim of trafficking in human beings in the territory of the SR or abroad. If the victim decides to cooperate with law enforcement authorities, the possibility of providing comprehensive care throughout the duration of the criminal proceedings is created.

200. The amendment to the Act No. 581/2004 has created conditions for a smooth provision of comprehensive health care from the public health insurance for all victims of trafficking in human beings included in the assistance programme. At the same time, presence of a legal representative is ensured, which is particularly beneficial in relation to the professional and effective exercise of the victim's rights, active reference to the provisions of the relevant regulations and their consistent application in order to prevent secondary victimisation.

*Measures in the area of appropriate assistance and compensation for victims*

201. Victims have the right to compensation from the state to the extent and under the conditions set out in the Victims of Crime Act. The amendment of the Act in 2021 fundamentally changed the philosophy of compensation for the victims of violent crime. At the same time, access to professional assistance for the victims of crime has been simplified, including through the establishment of intervention centres. Under the Act No. 274/2017, victims of trafficking are considered to be particularly vulnerable victims with the right to receive specialised professional assistance (see point 159).

202. At its meeting held in 2020, the Expert Group on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings approved the National Reference Mechanism as a structure of cooperating entities through which state authorities fulfil their obligations to protect and promote the human rights of trafficked persons.

203. All suspected cases of potential trafficking in human beings are referred to a specialised unit of the PF SR – the National Unit for Combating Illegal Migration – which is competent for the detection and investigation of trafficking in human beings with a nationwide scope of powers. Two special interrogation rooms have also been built in Bratislava and Humenné for victims and witnesses of trafficking in human beings in order to create a suitable environment for interrogation. Since 2021, the training of officers of the PF SR within the national project “*Special Interrogation Rooms for Child Victims and Other Particularly Vulnerable Victims of Crime*” co-financed by the EU from the Internal Security Fund and in cooperation with the APF and the Investigation Department of the Criminal Police Office of the PPF SR has also included the issue of human trafficking (see points 152 to 159).

*Ensuring adequate protection of vulnerable groups*

204. In relation to the outbreak of the military conflict in Ukraine, the strategic objectives of the Contingency Plan also include paying more attention and protecting persons with specific needs, especially unaccompanied minors, persons with disabilities and women victims of human trafficking and/or sexual and gender-based violence.

205. Information material was produced in both Slovak and Ukrainian languages focusing on “forced child marriages” and 252 first contact persons were trained in this regard.

206. In the period under review, an information brochure “It Can’t Happen to Me” was also developed to inform the public about the risks related to the topic of trafficking in human beings, to provide preventive advice and recommendations on how not to become a victim, and to inform about the available options and contact details for assistance and support.

207. During the period under review 2016–2024, the SR participated in several international projects aimed at combating trafficking in human beings:

- Dutch “TeamWork!” project with the aim of strengthening multidisciplinary cooperation in the fight against trafficking in human beings for forced labour;
- EU’s HESTIA project – “Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings and Forced Marriages – a Multidisciplinary Solution”;
- TACT project – “Safe and Sustainable Return and Reintegration of the Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings from France, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain to Priority/Selected Countries (Albania, Morocco and Ukraine)”;
- Czech research project “Comprehensive Approach to the Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Children”.

### **Freedom of thought, conscience and religion**

#### **Reply to paragraph 18**

208. The SR has a broad concept of legislation defining the status and functioning of registered churches and religious societies in the society, as well as the issues of religious freedom. The regulations are in line with the international obligations of the SR and guarantee equal rights to all churches and religious societies regardless of their size. Confessional law also respects and guarantees the constitutional commitment to the freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, and guarantees an equal status of all churches and religious societies before the law.

209. With effect from 1 March 2017, the Religious Freedom Act was amended. According to the amended Act, churches and religious societies applying for registration must prove at least 50,000 adult members – citizens of the SR permanently residing in Slovakia, instead of the previous 20,000. The aim of this amendment was to eliminate speculative registrations of alleged churches and religious societies. The current legal requirement for the number of members of a church or religious society applying for registration (the so-called “numerical census”) has recently been the subject of professional discussion and criticism, especially from unregistered churches and religious societies. At present, the Ministry of Culture is not preparing any change in this area.

### **Freedom of expression**

#### **Reply to paragraph 19**

##### *Measures to protect journalists*

210. Slovak legislation in the field of media ensures, in accordance with European standards, the independence and freedom of the media, including the independence of the public broadcaster, media pluralism, the performance of the journalistic profession is not conditional on official recognition by state authorities, it allows the restriction of press freedom only in cases established by law and also guarantees the protection of the source and information content. The MoC SR keeps making an effort to follow the basic democratic principles related to freedom of expression and the free expression of opinions, and it consistently takes into account the guarantee of media freedom and the unrestricted exercise of the right to access to information as well as respect for editorial independence in its legislative activities.

211. Slovakia supports the adoption of the European Media Freedom Act (*EMFA*), advocates for the protection of journalists on the Media Freedom Coalition platform, or through the Summit for Democracy, and provides cooperation to the MoJ SR in the field of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP). The MoC SR committed to the task of developing a strategic plan for the implementation of the CE’s recommendation on SLAPPs.

212. The Slovak Culture and Creative Industry Strategy 2030, which was approved by the Slovak Government Resolution No. 314/2023 of 12 June 2023, also includes a commitment to increase the protection and safety of journalists. The cooperation between the relevant ministries will also continue in the preparation of guidelines regarding the police procedure

in attacks on journalists and the determination of the mechanism for monitoring attacks on journalists, or in the examination of training possibilities for judges.

213. On 16 October 2023, the MoC SR established the Platform for Press Freedom and Protection of Journalists. The first meeting of the Platform was held on 8 November 2023. The Platform was established in accordance with the fulfilment of tasks specified in the Slovak Government Resolution No. 483/2023 of 27 September 2023 on the Open Government Initiative Action Plan for 2024–2026. The aim of the Platform is to coordinate matters of implementation of obligations resulting from international and national initiatives to support press freedom and protection of journalists. The Platform is also a national coordinating committee within the CE's Campaign for the Safety of Journalists.

214. In order to ensure a uniform procedure of the PF SR in the performance of tasks in connection with the proceedings on a criminal complaint filed by a journalist for the exercise of his/her profession, an internal legal act (Order of the President of the PF SR No. 23/2023) was issued with effect from 1 September 2023. The content of this order included tasks related to the filing of a criminal complaint by a journalist for the exercise of his/her profession. Based on this legal act, the PF SR keeps a record of notices from the Ján Kuciak Investigative Centre on deficiencies in the proceedings on criminal reports filed by journalists for the performance of their profession. This record will be a tool for evaluating and taking measures under applicable legislation to ensure effective action in the matters indicated in the notices, and to eliminate identified deficiencies.

215. One of the strategic objectives of the Strategy for the Prevention of Crime and Other Antisocial Activities in the Slovak Republic until 2028 is to develop a draft police methodology for the protection of journalists at high-risk mass events.

216. There are currently three criminal proceedings in which persons from the journalistic community appear in the procedural position of victims. The police perform tasks not only in the area of repression and suppression of criminal activity, but also prevention of and active search for illegal activity online. In this context, it monitors social networks and the Internet, focusing also on threats and actions aimed at possible danger to journalists (not only) for performing their jobs.

217. In the case of identified illegal attacks aimed at journalists, adequate forces and resources of the PF SR are used in order to solve the act and identify the perpetrator, including the cooperative coordination of the procedures of various departments of the PF SR, especially with the Computer Crime Department of the National Centre of Special Types of Crime of the PPF SR, the Criminalistics and Expertise Institute of the PF SR, Regional Directorates of the PF SR, etc. Depending on the nature of the case, the international organisations Europol and Interpol are also involved and, for the most serious criminal cases, task forces and specialised teams are set up.

### **Corporal punishment**

#### **Reply to paragraph 20**

218. Since January 2016, the Act No. 372/1990 has been in force; it emphasizes the unlawfulness of all acts of violence that interfere with the physical integrity of a close person and a person entrusted to the care or upbringing, including a child.

219. The medium-term priorities of the Slovak Government for 2023–2027 in the area of criminal policy include promoting changes that will lead to improved protection of women and children from domestic violence, effective prosecution and punishment of perpetrators of violence against children, perpetrators of sexual exploitation and harassment, including punishment for acts committed in the online space.

220. The MoLSAF SR is implementing several activities within the framework of the National Strategy and the AP of the National Strategy, which the Government of the Slovak Republic approved in November 2023 (see points 134 to 136).