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FLASH REPORT

Country:	Slovakia
Title:	The programme declaration of the new Slovak government has been approved by the Slovak Parliament
Date:	29 May 2020
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<u>Context</u>	
Issue at stake:	Implementation of policies and measures concerning the equality and inclusion of Roma living in marginalised communities
Grounds of discrimination:	All grounds
Field of application:	Education, Employment, Housing, Social protection
Source:	Policy development
Applicable law:	Constitution of the Slovak Republic; Article 33, Act no. 365/2004 Coll. on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination, amending and supplementing certain other laws (Anti-discrimination Act), Range of international human rights treaties imposing obligation on Slovakia to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights and of minorities including the prevention of discrimination

Content

Policy development: Following the parliamentary election held on 29 February 2020 in Slovakia, the new Slovak government has been formed based on an established coalition of four parties that have been in opposition to the previous government. The coalition is led by the party 'Ordinary People and Independent Persons' that won the election reaching over 25% of all votes. It focuses mainly on anti-corruption issues and in ideological terms is conservative, e.g. without plans to extend the current rights of LGBT persons. The other two coalition parties 'We are Family' and 'For People' also incline to ideological conservatism. The fourth party 'Freedom and Solidarity' profiles itself as liberal but is supposed to focus on pursuing liberal economic agenda, rather than broader liberal social values given its minor position in the government. On 19 April 2020 the new Government adopted its programme declaration and submitted it to the National Council of the Slovak republic (the Parliament), which approved it on 30 April and as such has given a vote of confidence in the new government.

The programme declaration is pro-democratic and embraces the governments' commitment for promoting rule of law, equality before the law as well as supporting vulnerable groups who need help in the society. In general, the main focus as for specifying concrete policies and measures is given to the prevention of corruption, strengthening trust of people in state institutions and rule of law.

In terms of the protection of human rights of minorities and protection from discrimination, the government declares to improve the quality of the current system of human rights protection in Slovakia, including the independent state mechanisms in this area, which obviously implicitly includes the equality body. The work of civil society organisations shall be supported. It also generally declares to support the protection of rights of children in all state policies, promote equality between women and men and prevent discrimination of women, without specifying any concrete policies and measures to be proposed.

The programme declaration also shortly deals with the protection of national minorities, while stressing their protection to be natural part of the government's mission. In this area the government specifically declares to adopt a law on the position of national minorities that should contribute to decelerating pressures on minorities to assimilate and guarantee the protection of their rights. It also plans to consider establishing the 'Office for National Minorities' with competences mainly to promote and respect domestic and international commitments of Slovakia concerning the standing and the rights of national minorities. This office is supposed take over the competences of the Office of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for National Minorities and the Slovak Government Council on Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality, that would be abolished. The declaration also mentions the option of expanding the scope of the law on the use of national minority languages to apply to higher territorial units.

The government in its programme declaration specifically discusses the situation of Roma living in marginalised Roma communities. It generally declares its commitment to:

- improve the civic, economic and social position of Roma and reduce poverty, above all in segregated areas in less developed regions;
- give particular emphasis on improving housing standards, access to potable water, access to basic infrastructure, and access to health care of Roma;
- actively support fair settling of the legal relationships on landed properties with a presence of marginalized Roma communities;
- 'make maximum effort' to prevent illegal groundless placement of Roma children in special primary schools for children with intellectual disabilities and secure their access to quality education on all levels;
- implement policies that would increase employment of Roma, particularly young people;
- support early pre-school education of socially disadvantaged Roma children, ideally from the age of three, prevent their early dropout from primary schools and support their later access to secondary/higher forms of education;
- strengthen Roma cultural identity and the Romani language;
- improve the perception of Roma in Slovak society and in this regard build up mutual social fellowship/cohesion;
- support the establishment and functioning of social enterprises in municipalities and regions in order to increase employment and work habits of citizens from marginalised groups;
- consider introducing the payment of social benefits at weekly intervals to a bank account, instead of cash disbursements;
- introduce the payment of childbirth allowance to minors to a bank account that will be linked to childcare expenses;
- introduce automatic collection of payments for housing from the bank account of the recipient of social benefits;
- consider strengthening the status of the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities towards relevant ministries, which are responsible for the implementation of the goals concerning the Roma minority in particular social areas.

In the area of education the new government specifically declares to promote equal educational opportunities, adopt the strategy on inclusive education and in line with this

strategy to provide overall support and services for schools, as well as to support projects that aim to assess methods for decreasing segregation in education.

The government further declares to introduce the reform of guardianship law aimed at people with physical or intellectual disabilities and protection of their position in legal relations, including the protection of their property.

Furthermore, it declares to review the legal regulation of Legal Aid Centres providing free legal help, including the evaluation of cooperation with lawyers, so that a larger group of low-income people is covered by this service and assess the need to increase the number of branches of these Centres.

The government also specifically declares to eliminate discrimination in the calculation of pensions for women born between 1958 and 1960, which was a legislative issue recently widely discussed in the Slovak media. The issue is currently reviewed by the Constitutional court, after the Slovak president submitted a complaint arguing existing discrimination.¹

Key points of analysis: The new Slovak government in its programme declaration approved by the Slovak parliament has committed itself to support overall social inclusion of Roma living in marginalised communities. It declared a range of measures that have a potential to tangibly contribute to positive development in this area, provided that they will be effectively implemented in practice. Some of the declared measures relies on marginalised Roma having bank accounts and their overall context and impact as such appear debatable.

Internet link source: The programme declaration of the Slovak government is available to download at:

<https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=zakony/cpt&ZakZborID=13&CisObdobia=8&ID=68>.

¹ For additional information see and article: <https://www.zenyvmeste.sk/odchod-do-dochodku-zeny-rocnik-1958-1959-1960>.