

Socioeconomic Exclusion and Roma Education in Slovakia

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A key problem in the Roma minority's social status in Slovakia and Central and Eastern Europe is education. Failure on all levels of the education system contributes to the socioeconomic exclusion of the Roma, leads to increased crime, and prevents members of the minority from having equal access to opportunities in the areas of employment and the fulfilment of life goals. Through analysis of successful projects and approaches, we want to outline ways Christian churches may support such projects in the interests of a society that is evolving positively and prospering.

Introduction

Socioeconomic exclusion is the result of a variety of factors, including the education system's lack of readiness to provide equal education opportunities to members of the social majority and minority group members, regarding every level of education from nursery schools to adult education. Results of various studies confirm the ongoing negative results of this kind of exclusion among the Roma ethnic group in Eastern Europe, while the status of this minority ethnic group varies. The Constitution of the Slovak Republic defines the status of the Roma as a minority in the Slovak Republic. Article 34, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Constitution standardizes the right to comprehensive development, and above all the right to develop their own culture together with other national minority or ethnic group members, the right to propagate and receive information in their native tongue, to link up with ethnic associations, to establish and maintain educational and cultural institutions, the right for education in

the ethnic minority languages, the right to use the ethnic minority language in official communications, and the right to participate in the resolution of affairs affecting ethnic minorities and ethnic groups. Other laws regulating the use of ethnic minority languages deal with a variety of areas, among which schooling also falls.¹ Above all, their fulfilment and implementation in practice means the overcoming of barriers, prejudices, the removal of stereotypes, and the building of new relationships between Roma and non-Roma. There is also potential in the inclusion of spiritually activated Roma and in Christian volunteers' practical help to comprehensively support the minority's positive development as part of a society that is prospering and evolving.

Social Exclusion and Education

A Decade of Roma Inclusion

The totalitarian regime focused exclusively on the socioeconomic aspect of solving problems in Roma settlements but did not respect the sociopsychological or sociopolitical side and completely ignored the ethnocultural side. The result of this kind of oversimplification was that the answer to the Roma question remained partially resolved and brought only limited results, slow to become evident.² The year 2015 saw the end of the short-term initiative “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015,” participated in by several postcommunist countries in cooperation with the World Bank and the Open Society Institute.³ The Slovak Republic's national plan, referring to this initiative, deals with the issue of education immediately in its first point.

Only a few years after the major political changes in Czechoslovakia, Professor Ctibor Nečas showed that, in view of education and qualification levels, the social impact of postrevolutionary economic reforms would affect the Roma population much more markedly than the rest of the population. He warned of social decline, the evidence of which is the perpetuation of backwardness and poverty, unemployment, and dependence on financial support and social welfare.⁴ Studies in Europe in recent years consider school segregation to be one of the most significant components of marginalization on the basis of ethnicity or religion. Among them is a comparative study of fifteen European countries from 2011, a research project entitled “Accept Pluralism” in which education itself was determined to be the greatest failing and challenge simultaneously, requiring immediate intervention. According to this study, twenty thousand to thirty thousand members of the Roma minority live in Poland. It is anticipated that at least nine million members of the Roma ethnic group live in the European Union,

diverging in their language and migration process. In the majority of cases, they use the national language and their own Romani dialect. However, in postcommunist countries the situation differs radically in that the Roma population was forcefully assimilated and integrated in the socioeconomic majority and also in the education system from 1945–1989.⁵ According to the Roma Communities in SR (Slovak Republic) Atlas from 2013, the Roma population totaled 402,840 inhabitants, which was 7.45 percent of the population. This is four times the population recognized in an official census of the people in 2011.⁶

Romani Language and Inclusion

In 2001 Slovakia also ratified the European charter of regional and minority languages for the Romani language. Minorities in Slovakia had the right to education in their native tongue at all levels of education (preschool education, primary school, secondary school, and higher education, including adult education). This education was to be made possible for all pupils who evidenced interest in it. Several objective hindrances to the implementation of this right exist at the present time.⁷

The main problem is the school system's lack of readiness for educating Roma pupils.⁸ Social exclusion is also caused by the fact that Roma pupils in marginalized communities are often already failing at primary school because of a failure to socialize in the current school system.⁹ D. Hanesová drew attention to the fact that school does not reflect the multicultural composition of society and teachers are unprepared to teach in multicultural conditions.¹⁰

In 1999 a suggested concept for developing training and education was devised under the title "Project Millennium." It concerned a long-term concept for the development of schooling and education, which would become the basis for developing education over the next fifteen to twenty years. On the basis of public discussion about the proposed concept, a national program for schooling and education in Slovakia was created, which was approved by the government of the Slovak Republic in 2001 and accepted by the national council of the Slovak Republic in 2002.¹¹

Political support of inclusive education was expressed on a European level, for example, in the document "Improving Competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools,"¹² published by the European Commission (EC). The international research project EDUMIGROM, which focused on a comparative study of inclusive education of ethnic minorities, showed that segregation is present in the whole of Europe but perception of this problem and strategic solutions vary greatly in individual countries, and

especially in Eastern Europe. The trend toward implementing inclusive education as part of standard education is also backed up by numerous international studies, which indicate that children with special educational needs taught in inclusive school systems where an adequate infrastructure of services and counsel is provided, achieve a more comprehensive development of competences and knowledge. These studies also show that other children's educational opportunities are not limited in a system set up in this way. Not least of all, research findings are available which indicate that inclusivity in education aids the increase of tolerance in society.¹³

Bulgaria, for example, is one of the countries that have positive experiences with inclusive programs in the area of educating Roma children. The preliminary projects of desegregation carried out from 2002 and financed from the Bulgarian Roma education fund are a good example of third-sector activity essential to solving problems of discriminatory treatment in education. A common feature of these initiatives is also the emphasis on multicultural education, which should contribute to respect for and conservation of the cultural identity of Roma children. Monitoring and analysis of the impact on children's education was provided by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, which also evaluated various circumstances surrounding pupils' school success. The evaluative research showed that absence and also premature termination of studies among children involved in these projects were noticeably lower than in the control group under observation. Children who attended nursery schools or were intensively engaged in full-time institutional education were more successful. The desegregation projects mentioned meant an important precedence for improving children's educational opportunities through the spread of integrated education and in so doing showed the way to public policy makers. After the nongovernmental sector showed how to implement successful organizational models of integration, calculating the expenses connected with a massive expansion of the desegregational process became possible.¹⁴

The Slovak Republic declared its active interest in the issue of inclusive education in the school system with its acceptance of various legislative and conceptual documents. "The Integrated Education Concept of Roma Children and Youth," including secondary and university education, was approved by the government decree of the SR no. 206/2008. In June 2009 Slovakia took over the annually rotating presidency in the international initiative "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015." In 2010 the planned revision of action plans was rescheduled for the period following the parliamentary elections. The strategy of the SR for Roma integration by 2020—SR government ruling no. 1/2012—introduced conceptual material approved by the SR government, which defined

starting points, principles of approach and long-term goals. The revised national action plan Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 was updated for 2011–2015 as a strategic action plan of the Slovak Republic for Roma integration by 2020, including the area of education. According to this document, in Slovakia in years gone by the acquisition of data about living conditions and discrimination was supplied by regulatory surveys of European institutions and specialized, primarily sociological studies in the Roma environment. The area of education comes first in the Strategy's priority policies. This was similar in the other countries involved; T. Szyszlak similarly characterizes the activities of the Bulgarian government.¹⁵

In 2014, after prior public discussion, the Slovak Republic Education Ministry published a *Report on the State of Education*. This report formulated core recommendations for implementing inclusive principles in education and schooling:

- Monitoring, evaluation, and publication of segregated and desegregated approaches of organizers and heads of nursery and primary schools and school institutions, observing their influence on the success rate of children and pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, attendance, socialization, et al.
- Developing methodology in the area of regulation and control of segregated practices and help with desegregation of children and pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁶

According to the Institute of School Information and Forecasts and Statistics, the number of Roma children at nursery schools after the revolution fell to 0.7 percent. This low percentage added significantly to the serious problems of Roma school-age children even from the first year of primary school.¹⁷ After a preliminary-year project was developed and endorsed by SR nursery schools, an experiment was carried out at selected Košice primary schools with a high concentration of Roma children. Based on the experiment's results, confirmation of the efficacy of preliminary years can be observed in these areas: acceleration of writing skills, expressive abilities, and fluency and wealth of verbal expression and vocabulary.¹⁸ Children from preliminary years displayed a more positive relationship to school and the school environment in general. In regard to the fact that the curriculum of the preliminary year is often created by dividing the first year's teaching material into two academic years (whereby a slower teaching tempo is made possible), the pupils of the preliminary year usually form the same class also in the first year and afterwards continue schooling in the same class for the duration of primary school attendance.¹⁹ According to the statistics, there is a profound difference in the formal educational level of the Roma (particularly

the marginalized) population when compared to the majority population in spite of this. The language barrier is one of the most significant problems among school-age Roma children; therefore, we will examine the current situation in the area of Romani language education more closely.

Curriculum in Romani Language

In 2008 the standardization of the Romani language in Slovakia was declared with the signing of the document in the SR National Council.²⁰ The standardization of the Romani language is an act laying down legislative foundations for the creation of suitable conditions for education and schooling in the Romani language including the preparation of educators teaching about or in the Romani language, use of the Romani language in the national minority's public or cultural life to the effect of implementing Law no. 184/1999 of July 10, 1999 concerning the use of national minority language and the European charter of regional or minority languages (addendum to SR Government resolution no. 27/2001).²¹

In 2010 the national pedagogical institute published the results of its experimental assessment regarding the effectiveness of the Romani language and literature curriculum in primary and secondary schools.²² Content and performance standards in these subjects and the inclusion of Romani language and literature among potential A-level subjects are the result of these tests. However, an acute lack of qualified teachers for the subjects mentioned and a lack of teaching texts and materials are ongoing problems. At the same time, there is a lack of teachers in Slovakia who would be able to teach the Romani language or teach in the Romani language. Certain gradual changes that may improve the situation are also taking place in this area. A lack of interest in education in the Romani language can be observed on the part of the Roma themselves in a number of studies carried out in Slovakia. This phenomenon is the result of the symbolic exclusion of Roma and the longstanding efforts of the socialist regime to assimilate them culturally and socially.²³

Within the framework of the aforementioned project which carried out experimental testing of a Romani language curriculum, several primary and secondary schools were set up at which teaching was taking place contemporaneously in Romani language, culture, and history. Experiences with this project may serve in the future as a model for education in the Romani language. The issue of segregating Roma children in special schools for the mentally handicapped is practically the same in all countries with high numbers of Roma. The principal theme in the area of Roma children's education is the tendency to transfer Roma children into special schools; at the same time this is subject to the greatest criticism on the

part of national and international organizations. There are many ways in which Roma children are segregated in education, but their transfer into special schools is the most significant example of segregation, having grave consequences for their future life and placing them in a decidedly inferior position vis-à-vis the majority population. In Slovakia in years past a large number of nongovernmental projects have been carried out, which have served as positive models for resolving the issue of the Roma's unequal access to education. Many of these projects (e.g., preliminary years and teaching assistants) are well known at present and are even included in valid legislation as nationwide projects. However, projects put into effect beyond our borders may also serve as good examples for future possible projects.

Projects Supporting Inclusion in the Education of Roma Children

The most significant international project was the *Step by Step (Krok za Krokom)* project, carried out in many countries with high numbers of Roma inhabitants, as well as in Slovakia, where it met with a positive reception. It concerns a project whose focus is reintegrating children from the disadvantaged background of special schools into the normal primary school system.²⁴ The *Step by Step* program has been successfully supported within the activity framework of the Open Society Foundations (OSF), which began in 1994 in the United States and spread initially through a network of involved institutes in Central and Eastern Europe. International Step by Step Association (ISSA) and its local partners support intense cooperation between schools and parents and the community, implemented through teaching assistants, who should be members of the ethnic minority wherever reasonable. ISSA has become the main network of institutions cooperating with local and national agents to introduce changes in practice. Several education ministries in the Central European region endorsed the ISSA development project, which is focused on preschool and school methodology.²⁵ In Poland, Roma assistants are part of the education system to support Roma pupils' successful integration into the educational process.²⁶ In Slovakia the same project is also happening as well as university preparation of qualified teaching assistants.

As yet there is a lack of qualified teachers in Slovakia who are capable or often even willing to work with Roma children. If the possibility were created for pedagogical school students to work as volunteers in Roma children education, assisted by appropriate textbooks and a multicultural approach, it would very likely mean a noticeable improvement in the educational readiness of Roma

children. Seeing as the Roma, as a national minority in Slovakia, have the right to education in their own language, mechanisms must be developed to make implementing this right possible.

An inspiring example is the integration of Roma children at a primary school in Budapest that is currently focused on offering equal education opportunities and development of children's distinctive talents. The school accepted educational plans that cultivate a positive perception of Roma culture through activities in the area of music and the integration of Roma history into the overall curriculum.²⁷ The collective education of Roma children with children from the majority population is one of the basic premises of the project, which is a successful example of integration and positive discrimination. In Slovakia alternative educational approaches also include other initiatives, besides the *Step by Step* project already mentioned, such as, for example: alternative nursery schools, the Hej Rup project of home preschool training of Roma children with direct parental participation, Gandhi schools, and so on.²⁸ According to research, from 1993–2000 projects with a focus on supporting the formal and informal education of Roma in Slovakia were 59 percent financed by foundations and 29 percent within the framework of the PHARE program.²⁹

Implementing the Minority Romani Language in Education

In 2014 the government office of the Slovak Republic published a quarterly report concerning the implementation of the European charter of regional or minority languages in the Slovak Republic (SR). The main source of data regarding the number of national minority members in SR was a population and housing census that was carried out throughout the territory of the Slovak Republic before May 21, 2011. In the census, nationality was recognized as a person's affiliation to a nationality or ethnic minority. Neither native tongue was definitive in determining nationality nor the language the citizen used mostly or spoke better, but his own decision concerning affiliation to a nationality or ethnic minority. The nationality of children up to the age of fifteen was noted according to the parents. If the parents claimed different nationalities, nationality was stated according to one of them (upon the mutual agreement of the parents). The native tongue was determined to be the one that the parents mostly spoke with the citizen during his or her childhood. In the case of differing parental languages, the language spoken with the child by the mother was recorded. Information about the native tongue did not have to match information about nationality. According to the results, 2 percent of the population in SR claim Roma nationality (105,738 members of

the population). The highest proportion of those belonging to the Roma minority is recorded in the following districts: Kežmarok (11.5 percent), Gelnica (8.9 percent), Vranov nad Topľou (9.04 percent), and Revúca (6.28 percent) in the eastern part of the country. On a regional level Roma reach the densest proportions in the Prešov region (5.3 percent).³⁰ In relation to official data about the number of Roma national minority members following the population and housing census in 2011, the report notes that the real number of Roma in Slovakia is several times greater and, according to expert estimates, is around 350,000 to 500,000. In the Roma Communities Atlas from 2013 around 402,840 Roma were identified, or people who are considered Roma by the community.³¹ In the wording of later regulations from 2011, an amendment to law no. 184/1999 (Slovak Law Codex) on the use of national minority languages supported the possibility of communication in the minority language in communities not exceeding a 20 percent margin in the case of oral communication. At the same time, the margin for use of national minority languages was lowered to 15 percent, according to two consecutive population censuses. In organizational pedagogical instructions for the academic year 2013/2014 specific recommendations for schools are stated:

In schools and educational facilities, a prohibition on all forms of discrimination and segregation must be consistently implemented, in order to eliminate objectionable trends, such as spatial, organizational, physical, or symbolic exclusion or separation of Roma pupils, based on ethnic affiliation (frequently combined with being socially disadvantaged), from the other pupils. There must be consistent solving of the problems of children and pupils belonging to marginalized groups, which complicate their acceptance process into normal schools and educational facilities, inclusion in normal classes and the subsequent teaching and educational process. Suitable conditions must be created for their education in schools and classes together with the majority population. Apart from the preliminary year, the creation of independent classes for children and pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds is not recommended.³²

In article 8 a panel of experts appeals emphatically to Slovak organizations to accept a structured approach and to introduce instruction in the Romani language for Roma children to a greater extent, in cooperation with Romani-speaking persons.³³

The aim of the national project, “Inclusive Education Model at the Pre-Primary Level of the School System” (MRK II), is to achieve integration in nursery schools of a maximum number of children from marginalized Roma communities and together with actively improving parental awareness, to increase their

readiness for entry into the primary level of education.³⁴ One hundred ten teaching assistants had been accepted within the project framework by September 2013, of which up to 80 percent had a command of the Romani language. Various activities were carried out in the framework of MRK II in 2014. Valid educational legislation makes teaching of the Romani language possible to primary and secondary schools through the school educational program (in the context of optional available subjects). Educational standards for Romani language and literature (for primary education, lower secondary education, and higher secondary education) are available on the website of the State Pedagogical Institute to schools displaying interest in this subject. As well as the State Pedagogical Institute, a subject committee has been set up for the subjects of Romani language and literature and Roma Realia, which deals with the innovation of educational standards and suggests alternative possibilities for Roma school education. Currently we do not have any record of a school or educational facility existing where the Romani language is taught. Only one school where the Romani language is taught is included in the network of schools and educational facilities of SR: the private grammar school Z. J. Mallu in Kremnica.³⁵ Further training in the setting of the methodological-pedagogical center (MPC) is provided by ROCEPO, the Prešov Roma Educational Centre, as an integral part of MPC Prešov.

On April 29, 2015 Slovakia was accused of misusing regulations and laws to wrongfully place Roma children in special schools for children with mental disabilities. It is considered to be the main argument in the decision of the European Commission to begin proceedings concerning the nonfulfillment of duties against the Slovak republic for the breach of the European Union (EU)'s antidiscriminatory legislation. In 2014 the Czech Republic was rebuked for the same infringement. The European commission called on the Slovak government repeatedly to adopt effective measures in the educational sphere through complex reform of the school system.³⁶ According to UN Developmental Programme research in 2012, more than 43 percent of Roma in schools were enrolled in ethnically segregated classes. According to AI, Roma pupils are placed in segregated schools separate from the majority population and are often wrongly placed in special classes and special schools. The establishment of container schools in 2013 and 2014 in communities in Eastern Slovakia fails to resolve the problem as it deepens the educational segregation of Roma children. A lack of complex solutions to the problem may be seen in spite of attempts to integrate a maximum number of children into proper education as a result of projects of Romani-speaking teaching assistants and preliminary years intended to help Romani-speaking children before they start fulltime school attendance.

Criminality and Exclusion

The marginalization of the Roma ethnic group is mentioned in the publication of Zoltan Barany *The East European Gypsies*, in which he quotes research published in 1999. In the research mentioned, up to 94 percent of Slovaks express that they would not like to have a Roma neighbor. Researchers from the Slovak Academy of Sciences analyzing ethnic stereotypes asked respondents the question, “What would be your first emotional reaction, in regard to the acceptance or non-acceptance of Gypsies?” More than 65 percent of them answered: “I would drive the Roma out from my country or I would only accept them as visitors.”³⁷

The emerging market economies created growing disparities between the rich and the poor in Eastern European countries, as far as Roma communities are concerned. Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov observed that as a result of many Roma successfully moving out of settlements, the traditional Roma colony does not present an accurate picture of the overall situation. In spite of this, the majority of researchers agree that a huge number of Eastern European Roma is significantly poorer than the majority population.³⁸ However, the fall of the communist regime created new possibilities for one of the traditional talents of the Roma, found in commercial activities. This concerns business sense and the ability to see possibilities in black market growth created by legal ambiguities. Many Roma in Albania, Macedonia, and Romania, like other members of these states, have fallen victim to pyramid schemes, where short-term investors lost their savings at the beginning of the nineties. Experts agree that growing social intolerance of the Roma in postcommunist countries of Eastern Europe reinforces their solidarity regardless of their socioeconomic inequality within the community. This view is at variance with other claims, according to which the Roma population is differentiated more vertically than horizontally, that it is becoming more hierarchical and groups who are moving toward being better off are distancing themselves from those whose living standard is “behind.” In fact, the majority of Roma who live in town do not have minimal solidarity only with the Roma in illegally inhabited communities. Roma from integrated areas, above all those who coexisted with non-Roma neighbors for at least one generation, do not identify with Roma from settlements. Many integrated Roma do not claim public allegiance to the Roma because of stigmatization and discrimination.

The social exclusion and discrimination of Roma in public affairs is a major influencing factor in Roma access to job opportunities, education, and other public services. Roma exclusion in Slovakia stems from a combination of historical, cultural, sociological, and geographical factors and varies noticeably from community to community.³⁹ As a consequence of the significant increase in

unemployment and poverty, it is hardly surprising that there was an increase in the intensity of Roma criminality in Eastern Europe in the nineties. The growing criminal statistics of the region are not only explained with Roma criminality. There were also other factors leading to a general public safety crisis which affected the whole population: growing poverty and social decline, worn-out social control in the postcommunist era, and a less effective application of the law. According to some sociologists and Roma leaders the vast majority of Roma criminal offences come from the least thriving 30–35 percent of the Roma population. Many activists concede that Roma criminal offences are on the increase and the characteristics of their criminality have changed for the worse, that is, that they have become more violent since 1989.⁴⁰ The growth of criminality among the Roma was much greater than among the overall population. One third of criminals arrested in Bulgaria in 1992 consisted of Roma who in 1994 were stated as responsible for 37 percent of all solved criminal offences in the country. According to some estimates, in the Czech Republic more than 50 percent of adult Roma may have an “entry in the criminal register.” In Budapest 80 percent of burglaries and 95 percent of pickpocketing are perpetrated by Roma.⁴¹ Especially high is the amount of theft and robbery among Roma, who some experts explain as having a traditionally liberal view concerning other people’s property. In a Bulgarian nationwide study 18 percent of Roma agreed that “since the state is not taking care of us, we have to steal” and 33 percent said that “stealing is a justifiable sin if there is no other way to provide for one’s children.”⁴² Organized gangs of Roma pickpockets were responsible for the dramatic growth in street theft.

In rural communities the situation is worse. Many reports describe how whole villages are terrorized by Roma whom inhabitants and local administrative bodies are helpless to tackle effectively. After a larger number of violent robberies committed by Roma, the best the powerless mayor could do was to warn non-Roma not to linger on the streets after dusk. Similarly in some regions of Bulgaria, where they were relatively well integrated until 1989, some Roma criminal offences are now leading to their overall isolation. In Bulgaria in 1994 Roma committed 88 percent of gang rapes and according to prosecution statistics also eight out of nine murders and violent burglaries and likewise fifteen of sixteen robberies. In Hungary researchers discovered that more than 50 percent of Roma offenders are violent. According to one report from 1992, Bulgarian Roma pimps organized prostitution in an ethnic group of Bulgarian girls aged 12–14, who were abducted, gang raped, and psychologically shattered before being forced to become prostitutes. It is mainly appalling criminal offences such as this that renew tensions between ethnic groups. According to Z. Barany, the phenomena

of Roma criminal activity should be observed in the right context. The majority of Roma have no natural source of properly-earned income and are poor and ignored by the majority population. Quite simply, many Roma have nothing to lose, especially because imprisonment in many cases means an improvement in their situation. If we bear in mind that their conditions encompass all the greater socioeconomic accelerators of criminal behavior in an acute form, one might wonder why the level of criminal activity of the Roma is not higher. Eliminating the causes and conditions of Roma criminality is made more challenging by the difficult socioeconomic situation in society and the options for resolving Roma living conditions.⁴³ While independent bodies in Slovakia are seeking individual solutions to the issue, we see even positive steps from the Government Office of the Ambassador for Roma Communities of SR, which prepared a handbook for local authorities in 2013 entitled “Roma neighborhood watches in marginalized Roma communities” with the goal of helping villages and towns in setting them up. The subject material provides a basic framework of processes, describing areas of activity, the powers of members of Roma neighborhood watches, legislative starting points, material equipment, as well as forms of cooperation with the SR Police Force, the local police, local government, government administration, rescue ambulance services, the SR fire and rescue brigade, the helping professions (such as community workers, field social workers, teaching assistants, community workers in the area of health education), members of the marginalized Roma communities, and other institutions.

Local governing bodies have potential with their keener knowledge of the situation of specific Roma groups living in their judicial areas. However, their approach to the Roma is shown to be problematic in some cases. Whatever the case may be, it is also their task to protect the remaining population in their judicial area from every kind of criminality. The most common phenomenon is the attempt of these ruling bodies to prevent the Roma from moving into their community’s land register.

The *Sociographic mapping of Roma communities in Slovakia*, also known as *Atlas of Roma Communities in Slovakia*, which was carried out under the auspices of the SR Government Office of the Ambassador for Roma Communities in 2004 and updated in 2010, provides us with an approximate estimate of the Slovak Roma population. At the most recent population and housing census in 2011, 105,738 inhabitants claimed Roma nationality, that is 2 percent of the overall population. However, the data from the census does not reflect the real number of people belonging to the Roma minority because a large section of Roma do not officially claim Roma nationality. According to an expert estimate, the proportion of Roma population was as much as 6.5 percent of the overall number

of inhabitants. The spatial distribution of Roma in Slovakia is strikingly uneven. In general, we observe a greater representation in the south and east Slovakia. A clear trend is the growing number of Roma living in concentrated numbers in areas within village and town limits and in spatially isolated settlements. It is also worth mentioning the problem of Roma migration in the context of Slovakia. Roma quite often encounter unwillingness, mainly on the part of small village mayors (prompted by the local inhabitants), to register them when endeavoring to change their place of residence. Hence, the common long-term solution is relocating Roma to other villages without changing their residential status.⁴⁴ Reports of a mass Roma relocation as a result of the construction of new flats for socially disadvantaged members of the population, or for other reasons, create panic among governing bodies and affected inhabitants.⁴⁵ Most recently, information was propagated by the media that Gelnica town hall wanted to remove a portion of its maladaptive inhabitants to the near vicinity of the neighboring village of Prakovce. Their local authority protested sharply and not even the invited Ambassador for Roma Communities has been able to resolve the dispute as of this writing.⁴⁶ Representatives of the OSCE also visited Slovakia on the occasion of a seminar entitled, "Building Trust and Understanding between the Police and the Roma." At this seminar the publication, "The Police, Roma, and Sinti: Examples of Good Practice for Building Trust and Understanding," was presented, which is a summary of principles and examples of good practice in this area, in various member countries of the OSCE. The publication was released in various European countries. In addition, there is beginning to be further scope here for cooperation with the OSCE in the area of education and specific training for members of the Slovak Republic Police Force. The goal of the seminar was to become familiarized with the experiences of other member countries of the OSCE regarding relationships between the police and Roma communities and to help remove some prevailing shortcomings in this area, as well as create room for exchanging experiences between the various agents on a national level.

Police specialists for community work, whose main job description is to supervise the maintenance of public order and solve small disputes reaching offense status in the Roma community, should also help in crime prevention. They are supposed to analyze the situation and problems leading to community members' wrongful actions and look for optimal ways to solve the problems identified (e.g., truancy, drug prevention, and so on) during their activities in the community and at regular meetings with community members and all involved state and local authority field social workers and workers of nongovernmental organizations. Another no-less-important task of the police specialists is to work specifically toward increasing the Roma community members' legal consciousness, to pro-

vide them with minor counselling services, and not least of all to ensure that the Roma's basic human rights will be upheld by the police. Through their activity in the community, they will endeavor to remove the barriers of distrust between the police force and Roma inhabitants and at the same time reduce bias among members of the police force against Roma, leading to the choice of appropriate police behavior regarding the Roma community.⁴⁷ Regarding the long-term problematical situation in Slovakia of trying to solve criminality in Roma settlements, a positive element is the attempt by local authorities to find new possibilities, also including the program, "Roma Neighborhood Watches in Marginalized Roma Communities." However, a positive experience with neighborhood watches at the Roma housing development Luník IX in Košice showed that their smooth financing must be ensured.⁴⁸ Cooperation between the Roma settlement watches and the local police may contribute toward better communication between the inhabitants and the police, as well as toward police credibility. Examples of good practice in other European Union states can be helpful in training members of the Slovak Republic police force even despite cultural and sociopolitical differences between individual countries.

Development of Religiosity and Inclusion Possibilities

The implementation of Christian values in the lives of individuals and whole communities can bring positive changes not only in their knowledge of God and his laws, but subsequently in the area of social inclusion also. The study SIRONA 2010, mapping the Christian churches' missionary activity in Roma communities in Slovakia, confirmed the basic starting-out theory that under the influence of religious missions, positive social change is seen and that in certain circumstances even social integration may be observed. In the light of positive social change regarding the Roma, the Roma mission's success was demonstrated by the actual Roma engaged in the research, and also by their non-Roma neighbors, mayors, school teachers, job office workers, and field social workers. The study determined that with religious change comes also social change, that is, broad-spectrum change in individuals' social habits and behavior, and that change holds great potential for social inclusion, insofar as Roma converts experience a growth in positive social skills and competences while the types of social behaviors, perceived as negative by the majority population, begin to decrease at the same time. On this basis, the authors of the study formulated recommendations for interested parties for effective fulfillment of Roma community needs through Christian mission and pastoral care.⁴⁹

The study *Evangelism in the Post-Marxist Czech and Slovak Republics*, developed by Tom Houston, Richard Worthing-Davies, and Roger Russell in the context of a joint project with the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, indicated that the religiosity of the population cannot be inferred from church affiliation or population census statistics. According to this study, for example, only 50 percent of the Slovak population hold sincere faith in God (compared to 74.4 percent of believers in Slovakia according to the 2011 census).⁵⁰ Several Protestant churches are losing members in comparison to 2001.⁵¹ The fact that people registered as belonging to a certain confession do not always participate in the life of their church or religious society is also confirmed by church service attendance. According to this study, 56 percent of Catholics and 44 percent of Protestants regularly attend services.⁵² The religiosity of the population in Slovakia changed radically after the fall of Communism, while it was only later that it began to react to the modernity that gradually began to influence the situation in society.⁵³ Paul M. Zulehner devoted attention to the issue of religiosity during communism and after its fall in Central and Eastern Europe. He analyzed the social position of Christian churches.⁵⁴ Despite the fact that the majority of Roma claim to be Christians, principally belonging to the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia, religion does not seem to be a bridge for the inclusion of the Roma ethnic group into the majority population. According to the study SIRONA, however, religiously activated Roma become integrated in the majority society and thus the active Christian life of converts has great potential for social inclusion. As Dana Hanesová mentions, the education system allows Roma children to attend religious education directly in schools, as this is taught as an alternative to ethical education.⁵⁵ Besides this religious education is being carried out in churches and para-church organizations as prevention for antisocial activities, as well as to offer leisure time in community centers to children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Conclusion

It is a well-known fact that the issue of education is the most important factor in resolving the lack of equal opportunities for Roma minority members in Central and Eastern Europe, and therefore this is the focus of government programs and projects financed by the European Union. Despite this, in the story of the quest for possible solutions, such as dealing with the use in education of the minority Romani language, we see obstacles yet to be overcome. Some models and projects we mention, carried out in neighboring countries and at home, may be an inspiration for planning similar activities. Slovak Christian churches that are

engaged in mission work in Roma communities participate in implementing projects to improve opportunities for academic success and the ability of Roma community members to assert themselves in their personal and professional lives. The authors of the cited project mapping missionary work among the Roma, call for a united and effective approach in pastoral care, on the basis of accumulated data about what really works and brings desired results in practice. According to their findings social change also comes with religious change, and it is a broad-spectrum change in individual social habits and behavior. Faith in God also brings the standards of Christian values into participants' lives and these values are implemented in the daily lives of individuals and whole societies.

Notes

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