|  |
| --- |
| **Ministry of Justice** |

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be here today. My name is Katarína Roskoványi and, as State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, I look forward to a constructive dialogue, but also to your recommendations on how to improve the human rights situation in Slovakia.

I would like to briefly follow up on the Head of Delegation's remarks and address some of the areas you have mentioned.

Every year, the Ministry of Justice provides **subsidies aimed at promoting, supporting and protecting human rights**. The call for projects is aimed at promoting, supporting and protecting human rights and freedoms, and preventing all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other manifestations of intolerance. Through the demand-oriented call, the Ministry of Justice distributes annually EUR 763,500.

For instance, we annually support information campaigns against discrimination and intolerance, projects on gender equality, gender based-violence, LGBTI, anti-Semitism, mental health or elder people.

A review of the scheme is currently underway. The aim is to increase the number of institutions and areas eligible for the scheme.

The Ministry of Justice also runs an **accreditation programme for victim support organisations**. The accredited organisations provide:

* general support – legal aid (in criminal proceedings and related civil proceedings), psychological help, social help, counselling on secondary and repeated victimisation and its prevention
* specialised support to particularly vulnerable victims – includes all aspect of general help and in addition, crisis psychological intervention, risk assessment, and mediation of emergency housing

Annual budget for grant scheme is 250 000 EUR with possibility for its enlargement in case of need.

In July 2021 an amendment to the Act on Victims´ Rights entered into force under which a new form of victim support organisation was established – **interventions centre for victims of domestic violence**.

The intervention centres proactively contact victims of domestic violence within 72 hours after receiving information from police on expulsion of a violent person from shared household and provide victims help and assistance.

There are 10 intervention centres in Slovakia, at least 1 in every region, the Ministry of Justice provides yearly grants for their functioning of approx. 1,6 million EUR in total.

The work of intervention centres is based on multi-institutional cooperation.[[1]](#footnote-1)

As you were briefly informed, we successfully ratified **the Optional protocol to Convention against Torture and the National preventive mechanism was established.**

Role and tasks are divided between the ombudsperson, commissioner for children and commissioner for persons with disabilities.

**The legislation on national preventive mechanism** has enabled the NPM to **use the allocated resources for strengthening of its personnel** in order to start working as an NPM after ratification of OP-CAT and to create necessary methodologies, establish contacts and cooperation for proper functioning.

*NPM has access to all necessary documentation, including medical documentation on provided healthcare. All 3 institutions are independent, can conduct interviews without presence of 3rd persons, can receive complaints from anyone and a claimant is notified of the outcome of investigation. Of course, submitting a complaint to any of these institutions cannot cause any harm to a claimant.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

Regarding the **Slovak National Centre for Human Rights**, I would like to clarify that any complex reform of the Centre will be considered after the adoption of EU standards on strengthening the role of equality bodies, in order to ensure that the reform meets the criteria of both the Paris Principles and the new binding standards for equality bodies.

However, even without any legislative changes the budget and personnel of the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights has been continuously increased.

The draft amendment to the **Anti-Discrimination Act** also aims to provide more effective protection in anti-discrimination disputes by clarifying and amending the principle of the reverse burden of proof and the possibility of using statistical data also in court disputes.

The bill also proposes the collection of equality data as an obligation for central government bodies and as an entitlement for other public authorities and legal persons.

On the other hand, there are still areas, where the implementation of the recommendation is still pending or is in progress, such as the amendment to Criminal Code or compensation to victims of the forced sterilization.

During the period under review, three amendments to the **Criminal Code** were prepared. Although none of these proposals were ultimately adopted, in the near future we intend to focus on a comprehensive **recodification of the Criminal law**, in which we will take into account our international obligations as well as the recommendations.

The protection of human rights, restorative justice and the humanization of prisons are some of the most important themes in our policy.

In reaction to the **advance question** from **the USA** regarding to ***the justice system***, let me inform you that we work very closely with European commission in order to safeguard the independence of the justice system and address corruption.

I would like to clarify that **the Office of the Special Prosecutor** has never been an independent institution, but only an organisational part of the General Prosecutor's Office.

Following the abolition of the Special Prosecutor's Office, the Serious Crime Unit was established in the General Prosecutor's Office, to which some of the Special Prosecutors are also assigned. Competence of the Special Prosecutor's Office has been transferred to the respective regional prosecution offices.

*Regional prosecutor's offices have a sufficient number of professionally skilled prosecutors who have several years of experience and have passed selection procedures identical to those of the prosecutors of the Office of the Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor's Office. Guarantees of functional independence of prosecutors remain unchanged.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

Since the Constitutional Court suspended the amendment to the Criminal Code regulating the statute of limitations and sentences, the legal situation prior to the amendment to the Criminal Code continues to apply.

Following the formal apology to **victims of forced sterilization**, the Ministry of Justice introduced a legislative intent of the law on financial compensation for these women, however, the legislative proposal was not adopted.

With regard to the **rights of LGBTI persons**, the Ministry of Justice submitted proposals for two laws aimed at providing greater legal certainty in the resolution of the living situations of unmarried couples, however, after the criticism from the LGBTI community, the proposals were withdrawn.

I hope I have been able to address some of your concerns, but as my time is running out, I would like to thank you again for this opportunity and give the floor to my colleagues.

|  |
| --- |
| **Ministry of Interior** |

Mr President, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is RB, I represent the Ministry of Interior, and I should like to briefly inform you about the measures and steps taken by the Slovak Republic in the area of fight against extremism, xenophobia and radicalism.

The Concept of the Fight against Radicalism and Extremism until 2024 is the fundamental strategic document dealing with the fight against radicalisation, extremism, various forms of discrimination on the grounds of belonging to a particular community and manifestations of hatred and racism in the Slovak Republic. It aims to prevent and, at the same time, to increase the effectiveness of the fight against any manifestation of extremism and hate speech.

In reaction to the advance questions from USA and Belgium concerning hate speech and hate crime let me inform you that, under the Slovak legal system, these criminal offences, as well as criminal offences against the LGBTI community, the Roma community and other minorities, fulfil the constitutive elements of the criminal offence of extremism and are investigated by specialised police officers of the National Criminal Agency of the Presidium of the Police Force.

As part of inter-ministerial cooperation, a Committee for the Prevention and Elimination of Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance has been set up, in which the relevant public authorities, independent institutions, experts, as well as civil society, including representatives of minorities and non-profit NGOs, are represented.

Another important step towards strengthening mutual coordination was the establishment of the National Expert Group on the Elimination of Racially Motivated Crime, Extremism and Terrorism.

It is fair to say that following the legislative and organisational changes effective since 2017, with regard to the specialisation of law enforcement agencies, the Slovak Republic has seen more significant accomplishments in the area of fighting extremism. There has been an increase in the number of detected and investigated cases, and typical serious right-wing extremist events have been eliminated. In 2020, there was a relatively significant increase in the number of prosecutions initiated for extremism offences, which can be ascribed to the population's considerable frustration with the COVID-19 pandemic.

An important turning point was the terrorist act committed on Zámocká Street in Bratislava against the LGBTI community.

This terrorist attack demonstrated what a fundamental influence social networks and internet platforms as such can have in the process of radicalisation. In this regard, it is important to note that, with effect from 1 July 2022, an act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic authorises the Police Force to remove terrorist content from the Internet. What we still consider problematic is that we do not have access to tools that would carry out automated crawling of internet.

The Strategy for the Prevention of Crime and Other Anti-Social Activities in the Slovak Republic until 2028 is the most recent strategic-conceptual document, which builds on the previous mentioned documents of this kind. When compared to the previous documents, it is based on a multidisciplinary approach to crime prevention, which reflects the broader context of criminogenic factors, adopts the so-called evidence-based crime prevention, also proposes recommendations for local governments and the civil sector, and contains a clear scheme of interconnectedness of measurable objectives and measurable tasks addressed to the central government authorities.

The newly established Working Group on the Protection of Soft Targets is a new coordinating element in the field of countering various forms of extremism, racism and xenophobia in 2024; it was established due to the current situation and social threats to the protection of life and health of the Slovak Republic's population in public spaces and facilities. The Chairperson is the 1st State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior.

The Ministry of Interior participates in many preventive and informative programmes aimed at improvement of security, civil coexistence and situational prevention. Both within the Police Force in relation to police officers, and in relation to the public.

The Police Force carries out preventive activities and projects in the form of lectures and discussions focusing on tolerance towards foreigners and population groups with regard to race, cultural diversity, religion, etc. Further information on the individual activities is provided in the Situation Report.

Significant awareness-raising activities in the field of prevention are carried out by the information offices (mentioned in the presentation of the Head of Delegation) established under the Ministry of Interior. Activities are carried out to help raise awareness for the protection of victims, in the form of educational preventive activities, focusing also on the topic of "anti-Semitism" or "hate speech". Since 2020, 2,550 such activities have been carried out for almost 67,000 participants.

Their primary objective is to improve the protection, support and assistance to victims of crime, including victims of human trafficking.

On 18 October 2023, the Government adopted a new strategic document in relation to the issue of trafficking in human beings - the National Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for the years 2024-2028 and the Action Plan for the same period. Its primary purpose is to apply good practices, thus contributing to the reduction in opportunities for the commission of the crime of trafficking in human beings, as well as to support mechanisms to provide assistance and support to victims.

In addition to the many preventive activities aimed at potential victims of trafficking in human beings which the Slovak Republic mentioned in the Situation Report, I would like to highlight the cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in October 2023, within the framework of the BLUE HEART Campaign. The Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with UNODC, created visuals for social media and print formats featuring a person of any age with the slogan "My heart for victims of human trafficking". The campaign was also supported by commercial cinema chains nationwide.

The issue of trafficking in human beings is closely linked to the topic of migration in general. Migration in Slovakia has been significantly affected by the mass influx of Ukrainian nationals to the territory of the Slovak Republic caused by the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine. As a consequence, the Government adopted the Contingency Plan of the Slovak Republic for dealing with the emergency situation. Five large-scale centres for the rapid processing of applications for temporary protection were established.

Refugees from Ukraine who have applied for international protection and have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection are entitled to receive a one-off allowance and an integration allowance for a period of 6 consecutive months and can also apply for material need assistance.

As of 7 April 2024, 142,106 persons have requested temporary asylum since the beginning of the conflict. The majority ~~(99.4%)~~ are Ukrainian nationals ~~(141 264).~~ As of the end of February 2024, aproximately120 000 Ukrainian nationals were enjoying temporary.

Mr President, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

This was a brief overview of progress in the fight against the most serious criminal offences which affect the protection of human rights in the Slovak Republic. Thank you very much for your attention.

|  |
| --- |
|  **Ministry of Culture** |

In relation to the protection of journalists, a new unified methodology was developed by the Police Force of the Slovak Republic in 2023, which includes the procedures of several components of the Police Force of the Slovak Corps in proceedings on a criminal complaint filed by a journalist for the exercise of his profession. One possible measure in case of dangerous threats is also the provision of temporary personal protection. Since September 2023, the Police Force of the Slovak Republic has been cooperating with the non-governmental organisation Ján Kuciak Investigative Centre, which draws attention to shortcomings in proceedings on criminal complaints of journalists for the exercise of their profession. This record of deficiencies will be in the future a tool for evaluating and adopting measures within the framework of the current legislation to ensure effective proceedings in the cases identified in the alerts, i.e. to remedy the identified deficiencies.

The Slovak Culture and Creative Industry Strategy 2030, which was approved by the Slovak Government in June 2023, also include 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. These tasks are included in the Strategy of prevention of criminal and other anti-social activities in the Slovak Republic until 2028.

On the 16th October 2023, the Ministry of Culture established the Platform for Press Freedom and Protection of Journalists. The Platform was established in accordance with the Government Resolution of the 27th September 2023 on the Open Government Initiative Action Plan for 2024-2026. The aim of the Platform is to coordinate the 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 Council of Europe's Campaign for the Safety of Journalists.

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.

**(The answer to the questions of The UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND)**

Slovakia supports the adoption of the European Media Freedom Act, advocates for the protection of journalists through the Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists, the Media Freedom Coalition platform, or through the Summit for Democracy, and cooperates with the Ministry of Justice of the SR in the field of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP). Ministry of Culture committed to the task of developing a strategic plan for the implementation of the Council of Europe's recommendation on SLAPPs and appointed a National Coordinator for the Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists.

The current 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, pluralism, the performance of the journalistic profession is not conditional on official recognition by state authorities, the restriction of freedom of the press is permitted only in accordance with the law, in s Art. 10 ECHR, and also guarantees the protection of the source and content of information. On August 1, 2022, the Act on Media Services and the Act on Publications entered into force. The guarantee of media freedom is translated directly into the provisions of the laws in question.

**(The answer to the question of SWEDEN)**

The draft law on Slovak television and radio and on the amendment of some laws, which was approved by the government of the Slovak Republic at its meeting on 24/04/2024, was submitted to the parliament, and it is expected that the parliament will start dealing with the submitted draft law in the coming weeks.

As part of the interdepartmental comment procedure on the said draft law, several comments were made, through which doubts were expressed about the independence of the public broadcaster in the case of the statutory anchoring of the program board, also in the case if the public broadcaster will be financed, in addition to the claimable contribution, also through the so-called contract with the state and if the legal reasons for dismissing the general director are not exhaustively defined in advance. The proponent of the law accepted all the above-mentioned reservations of a fundamental nature and incorporated them into the draft law.

|  |
| --- |
| **Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family** |

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Slovak Republic implemented national project Gender equality in the workplace, focused on solving the problem of reconciling private, working and family life, through system measures, options, solutions and concrete examples for employers in the specified areas.

An amendment to the Labor Code changed the rules for protecting employees, the employee has the right to file a complaint with the employer in connection with a violation of the principle of equal treatment; the employer is obliged to respond to the employee's complaint in writing without delay, to make corrections, to refrain from such action and to remove its consequences.

In connection with the elimination of the negative effects of maternity and parental leave, an amendment to the Social Insurance Act was adopted, which introduced a new pension benefit – parental pension, further a new social insurance benefit was adopted, the "Pregnancy cash benefit", which serves to financially support mothers and families during pregnancy.

To support the reconciliation of family and work life an amendment to the Labor Code introduced the "paternity leave", the father has the right to a paid two-week leave in the period of six weeks from the birth of the child.

In reaction to advance question of Uruguay, to raise awareness of discriminatory stereotypes related to the social and family roles of women and men in Slovakia in order to achieve effective gender equality in society, the Slovak republic prepared national projects to support a change in the social perception of the status of women in the workplace through education, information and advisory activities, and the influence of professional information activities. Information and counseling activities will be targeted at a specific confluence of life roles (work, family, household, care of dependent persons, social position). The activities will be thematically focused according to the age of the recipients to raise awareness of the need to respect human rights and especially gender equality in the workplace and the possibility of protection against discriminatory actions at work, which they may be exposed to in connection with the reconciliation of work, private and family life.

In reaction to advance question of Belgium, if Slovak republic will reinitiate the ratification process of the Istanbul Convention, it is true that Slovakia has not ratified the Convention, however the principles and terms in the Convention are based on the customary terminology in the field of gender equality, which is included in the legislation. In an effort to start solving the problem comprehensively and systematically, Slovakia adopted the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women, with the goal to create, implement and coordinate a comprehensive national policy for the prevention and elimination of violence against women. In addition, the Slovak Republic will transpose the European parliament and council directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, which has the same goal as the Istanbul Convention.

In 2019, a new organizational unit the National Coordination Center for Solving the Problem of Violence against Children was established to coordinate state policy in the area of ​​protecting children from violence.

At the national level, since 2018, we have been implementing education for professionals with focus on working with children who commit violence, created together with children - children's participation is an integral part of the creation of state policies in this area.

The European child guarantee was adopted in 2023, which contributes to the fight against generational poverty. Slovak Republic emphasizes education, its availability and quality, as well as adequate housing, affordable healthcare and healthy nutrition.

The Concept for the Protection of Children in the Digital Space was adopted in 2020 with action plan for the years 2024-2025. The aim of this document is to contribute to promoting children's online safety and increasing levels of media literacy.

Slovak republic is implementing a national project aimed at the support of distance counseling through help lines, as the paradigm of counseling after the pandemic. As part of this support, distance counseling standards were also prepared.

Every year since 2019, the research "Experience and behavior of children in the online world" has been carried out, which monitors trends in this area (poverty and inflation).

Mr. President

Slovak Republic implemented the National Program of Active Aging for the years 2021-2030. The document focuses on all persons actively preparing for aging, including older persons who could be disadvantaged in any way due to their age.

Measures were implemented with a focus on:

* preparation of human resources in the context of working with seniors in the educational process,
* preparation of qualified human resources for the introduction of age management,
* streamlining the activities of the Council for the rights of senior citizens and for adapting public policies to the process of population aging,
* the pension system with the aim of supporting its long-term sustainability and ensuring income in old age, including the introduction of an early old-age pension,
* protecting the mental health of the elderly and early diagnosis of its disorders.

Most measures are implemented on an ongoing basis:

* conditions are created for older people to remain in the home environment,
* follow-up health care is supported, which prevents dependence on the help of another person,
* the employment of persons over 50 is supported through more effective active measures on the labor market; employment support in the field of social economy,
* measures are implemented to support maintaining of social contacts through leisure activities,
* help is provided to older people in crisis situations through the Senior hotline,
* material and food aid is provided to the most dependent elderly persons.

In reaction to advance question of Slovenia, concerning the measures to combat ageism and eliminate age discrimination in all its forms, and to protect the human rights of older persons, Slovak Republic applies various measures aimed at combating ageism, eliminating all forms of discrimination and protecting the human rights of older persons. Examples of the fight against ageism include the anti-discrimination law, which ensures equal treatment in many areas of public life. A role in the protection of the rights of elderly persons is also played by the public defender of rights, whose authority is also to investigate complaints of elderly people of various nature. Another measure to protect the human rights of the elderly is the office of the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, which examines the initiatives of persons with disabilities in relation to the authorities in the field of employment, civil law and the family agenda, healthcare and social insurance, barrier-free accessibility and social services.

|  |
| --- |
| **Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth**  |

As already mentioned by the head of the delegation for the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Education is fully aware of the challenges associated with respecting human rights, when it comes to the goal of inclusive education. We are aware of the need for special attention paid to the children of different ethnicities, nationalities, but also children with different kinds of mental, or physical disadvantages.

The head of the delegation has already mentioned 39 points leading to the improvement of the state of education in Slovakia. I would like to present a few of them, including the outcomes they entail, and I will also touch on the reforms and changes that are moving us towards a quality and inclusive school system.

Each of the mentioned 39 points is developed within the framework of project management into separate projects with the aim of fulfilling the obligations of the Program Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the years 2023-2027. One of the projects of the Program of Changes is the **Project Opportunity for all children**, with the intention that **all children in Slovakia, after they finish the education, must have the opportunity to find a job, to lead a dignified and fulfilling life in adulthood.** The main goal is **to increase the quality of education for children from an environment of generational poverty, with a health disadvantage, or otherwise disadvantaged pupils and to ensure the application of inclusive measures so that the needs of national minority education are also respected**. In response to the advance question from Uruguay we need to state that in 2021 the definition of nationality education was introduced into the Education Act.

In response to the advance questions from Sweden, United Kingdom and United States, in December 2023, the Ministry of Education officially finalised and published the **Methodological Guide on Desegregation in Education**, which provides schools, founders, government employees and the public with an explanation of the issue and the typology of segregation with its causes and suggestions for possible solutions. This publication is publicly available on the website of the Ministry.

Following the publication of the mentioned Guide, the Ministry is preparing an amendment to the Education Act that would make it mandatory for schools to comply with **desegregation standards**, which is currently being finalised by the Ministry. The standards should contribute to the prevention of segregation practices in education in Slovakia.

In April this year, the **national project Opportunity for All Children** was approved, which includes pilot testing of desegregation projects in selected schools and data collection of good practice. We then want to offer this experience to the general public, but especially to head teachers and founders of schools that will go through the desegregation process in the future. At the same time, we are also going to create and apply a system for monitoring segregation in education and training, which will enable us to know which schools should be the primary focus in the future.

I would also like to highlight the benefits of a number of other national projects that address serious problems related to respect for human rights. One of these is the **National Project Standards**, which in 2023 finalised a database of procedures that the school and counselling system must follow when working with a child. Today, these outcomes are legally binding and need to be monitored for compliance. The second major project is the **Preventing Early School Leaving**, which aims to establish a system for catching and dealing with cases where a child is at risk of dropping out of the education system. Both of these projects greatly assist marginalised communities most affected by the phenomena of early school leaving and misdiagnosis.

In July 2023, the Ministry of Education announced a grant call to support **early care providers** with Recovery and Resilience Plan funds. The goal is to work with families in the home environment, helping to overcome existing barriers, improve the abilities of children aged zero to six from Roma marginalised communities, and prepare them to enter pre-primary education.

In conclusion, I would like to inform you that in February 2024, the **Department of Support for the Inclusion of Marginalized Groups** was established at the Ministry of Education, under the Department of National and Inclusive Education, which ensures that the most vulnerable are not forgotten during all changes and reforms.

Thank you for your attention.

|  |
| --- |
|  **Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities** |

Dear Commissioner, dear members of the Council, dear ladies, and gentlemen,

from the position of Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities, I would like to say following:

**In the area of housing**, we continue to implement support regarding assistance to municipalities in land settlement and simple land adjustments.

Settlement of ownership relations to land is one of the biggest challenges we have faced after the creation of the independent Slovak Republic. We are currently preparing special support for the completion of basic infrastructure in settlements with a concentration of marginalized communities. In this way, we will be able to further ensure accessibility to drinking water and completion of the sewage network, waste management, revitalization of the territory and elimination of adverse effects on the environment, construction, modernization of roads, etc.

In the upcoming period, we plan to devote special attention to other topics, such as the environment and energy poverty, digitization of data, or the elimination of risks from drought and floods.

**In the field of education**, our main priorities are inclusion in kindergartens, the completion of school infrastructure, the elimination of two-shift operation of primary schools and the increase of kindergarten capacities.

**In the area of employment**, which we consider to be one of the key elements in the inclusion of marginalized Roma communities, we focus mainly on increasing employment on the labor market and employability via employment contract.

We focus on help with job counseling and debt relief, and on support in acquiring qualification prerequisites and skills based on the requirements of employers and needs of the labor market, especially for unqualified or low-qualified adults.

Educational activities are aimed at equality between men and women, reconciliation of work and personal life, and in the future, we plan to focus on breaking down negative stereotypes in the traditional division of gender roles. For the next period, our main priorities are increasing the employment of women, and the support of childcare.

In the field of employment of Roma men and women, we also actively communicate with the private sector, especially with representatives of large companies and state enterprises.

In reaction to the advance questions from Sweden and Canada, **in the area of health**, we currently prepare special measures to ensure accessibility in the provision of institutional health care in settlements with the presence of marginalized communities. Activities in the field of health are coordinated by the Office, but they are primarily covered by the Healthy Regions organization.

Regarding the issue of forced sterilizations, I would like to state that despite the prematurely terminated process, the Office fully supports the compensation in question and continues to have the ambition to negotiate this proposal to achieve a remedy for all the victims.

**In the area of combating anti-Roma racism and supporting participation**, we focus on the fight against discrimination and anti-Roma racism, reducing prejudices and stereotypes, as well as strengthening the participation of Romani women and men at all levels. Sensitizing the population is an equally big challenge.

We actively continue all activities aimed at awareness programs, training of the public, community, representatives of professions (judges, prosecutors, doctors), raising awareness about the application of anti-discrimination legislation, but also creating publications, campaigns, involving Roma youth in processes, or spreading awareness about Roma history and culture.

In reaction to the advance questions from Canada, I would like to point out that we fulfill these activities not only by ourselves but also in close cooperation with other entities, such as the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, the Public Defender of Rights, the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, and various other central state administration bodies and NGOs.

We also have an ambition to enter the teaching process with interactive textbooks that would support discussion platforms focused on the topic of discrimination and help students acquire argumentative skills and critical thinking.

Thank you for your attention.

|  |
| --- |
| **Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for National Minorities**  |

Thank you very much for the floor.

A very important milestone for national minorities since 2019 has been the 2021 census. Censuses in Slovakia traditionally include questions on nationality and mother tongue. Data on nationality are important from a minority perspective because the language legislation in force allows for the use of minority languages in official contacts in municipalities where at least 15% of the citizens declared themselves to be of a given nationality in two censuses. The list of these municipalities is laid down in a government resolution. The novelty of the 2021 census was that it was now possible to declare belonging to two nationalities, which proved to be beneficial for minorities. In 2023, the government adopted a new list based on the results of the census and compiled this by adding together the number of people who belonged to a particular nationality in both first place and second place. For example, in the case of the most populous national minority, despite a significant decrease in the number of native Hungarian speakers, this will reduce the negative consequences in terms of language use opportunities due to the inclusion of the second nationality.

In my short contribution, I would like to highlight some important **legislative changes since 2019**. The Education Act stipulates that Slovak language must be taught in minority schools using the method of teaching a foreign/second language. Hopefully this change will make it easier and more effective to learn the state language for children with minority mother tongue, who live in areas where the minority language is dominant.

Another amendment relates to the use of languages in the field of traffic, which could improve visual bilingualism in the future in areas inhabited by minorities. The amendment to the Minority Language Use Act, which has already entered into force in 2022, allows all **inscriptions on road signs**, including geographical names, to be displayed in minority languages in addition to the state language. We are currently negotiating amendments to the technical specifications with the relevant ministry that would facilitate the implementation of this possibility.

**In reaction to the advance questions** from Uruguay concerning *to adopt policies aimed at including representatives of these minorities at the various levels of national and local government* let me inform you about the steps that Slovakia has made or are in progress.

Based on *Action Plan for the Protection of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities and Ethnic Groups for 2021-2025*, the drafting of the comprehensive and coherent legislation on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities has started with the participation of minority representatives. In the **draft law on the status of persons belonging to national minorities** prepared by the *Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for National Minorities* during the last period, solutions were already sought to ensure adequate participation of minority representatives at different levels of decision-making. The task of drafting a comprehensive law on minorities remains and we are confident that an acceptable solution can be found, which can be put into practice by adopting a new law on minorities. In the last parliamentary elections, a party representing ethnic minority voters did run, but it failed to meet the 5% threshold, which applies to all parties equally regardless of whether they are parties of national minorities or not. However, the Prime Minister has offered the opportunity for this party, which is currently outside parliament, to suggest a candidate for the *Plenipotentiary of the Government for National Minorities*. In my person, the representative of the largest national minority in Slovakia can now serve in this position. At the level of regional and local self-government, where there live a significant number of persons belonging to national minorities, minority representatives are also elected to the councils of representatives. Problems to be solved are mainly in the case of minorities and in municipalities where the number and proportion of minorities is very low.

In March this year, the government adopted and is currently before parliament an **amendment to the Competences Act**, which will create a separate *Council of the Government for National Minorities*. Since 2011, a *Committee on National Minorities and Ethnic Groups* has been operating within the frame of the *Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality*, in which the 14 recognized national minorities in Slovakia are represented. Part of members are elected and delegated by the organizations of each minority. This form of participation would be maintained in new government council, but in the higher level, which will hopefully improve efficiency in this field. The amendment will also convert the posts of government plenipotentiaries for national minorities and Roma Communities into permanent posts. It also clarifies the competences in the field of national minorities, entrusting this to the Government Office of the Slovak Republic.

The government has adopted a **new statute for the Plenipotentiary of the Government for National Minorities** which expanded and clarified his/my competences in certain points, for example in the field of development of official terminology in minority languages.

On the basis of the action plan and individual government decisions, we are working on two other important legislative tasks in addition to the bill on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. One is to create a **financial support mechanism** to provide support to local government bodies to ensure bilingualism, and the other is to amend the law on the use of minority languages to ensure that **the use of minority languages** is not only provided for individual settlements, but also **for regional areas** where a significant number of persons belonging to minorities live.

|  |
| --- |
| **Ministry of Health** |

Distinguished delegates,

As a representative of the Ministry of Health, I am honoured to address this distinguished gathering as we engage in the Universal Periodic Review, an important mechanism for assessing the state of human rights in our country and around the world.

Allow me to highlight our position on specific recommendations and initiatives related to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The Ministry of Health considers the area focused on the protection and support of women's and mothers' reproductive health as a priority, despite the fact that the Slovak Republic does not have a comprehensive programme on sexual and reproductive health and rights. The MoH continuously develops proposals for the basic directions of the state health policy and develops them in the light of the current Slovak legislation and approved non-legislative documents.

In the area of processes to promote women's reproductive health and safe motherhood, we mention in particular

* Accredited study programmes in lactation counselling for health professionals.
* Implementation of maternal and newborn care standards under the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative.
* Ongoing internal evaluation of health facilities.
* Integration of breastfeeding data into medical records.
* Establishing quality measures to maintain standards.
* Multi-year projects with WHO to improve access to infertility treatment.

Regarding **the recommendation to cover costs associated with sexual and reproductive health,** under the current legislation, the costs related to the provision of health care in the field of reproductive health are either fully covered, partially covered, or in some cases not covered by public health insurance.

No measures have been taken to introduce legislation on universal coverage by public health insurance of all costs related to legal abortion, including abortion on demand, and modern contraceptives for the prevention of unwanted pregnancy.

EU Member States have the right to decide on the price and reimbursement of medicines covered by public health insurance within the competence of individual states. The Slovak Republic will therefore continue to make use of these competences, which are part of our national health system. And this with reference to the fact that the legislation of the Slovak Republic prioritises the right to health protection, equal access to ensuring affordable and quality health care for all citizens, while respecting all aspects of human rights established by international treaties.

It follows from the government regulation that medical procedures from the catalogue of procedures for abortion on medical grounds, which are listed in a special regulation, are fully reimbursed on the basis of public health insurance.

The medical procedure of abortion, which that is not performed for medical reasons, is not covered by the public health insurance - the woman has to pay for it herself.

Contraceptives means to prevent unwanted pregnancy are not covered by public health insurance in Slovakia. Slovakia has a problem with the labelling of a product whose main effect is an abortifacient, as a part of provision of health care services to a person in Slovakia.

In line with **the recommendations regarding artificial termination of pregnancy,** the national legislation stipulates that the condition for performing an artificial termination of pregnancy is written informed consent after prior instruction. Such informed consent must include the date of its provision and the signature of the woman requesting abortion or her legal representative.

In response to the preliminary question submitted by Belgium, it should be noted that the Slovak Republic provides access to abortion (as a safe artificial termination of pregnancy) in accordance with the Act on Artificial Termination of Pregnancy. Artificial termination of pregnancy is performed in institutional health care facilities at the written request of the woman on the basis of a medical indication on the part of the woman or an identified congenital developmental defect on the part of the child, or within 12 weeks of pregnancy and the woman submits a written request, and if her state of health does not prevent it. This means that there are no legal barriers to accessing abortion in the Slovak Republic.

**When it comes to abortion, our laws prioritise informed consent and medical supervision. While efforts for legislative change continue, our current framework strikes a balance between women's rights and the protection of unborn life. The current abortion legislation in Slovakia has been reviewed by the Slovak Constitutional Court, which confirmed its compliance with the Slovak Republic's international human rights obligations.**

Concerning **the recommendation on discrimination against Roma women in access to sexual and reproductive health and rights**, it should be noted that issues of health care and access to sexual and reproductive health are given special attention by the competent authorities of the Slovak Republic.

The MoH has established a state contributory organisation called "Healthy Regions" with the aim of creating space for the implementation of temporary compensatory measures aimed at improving the health situation of socially excluded groups and offering the possibility of a comprehensive, systematic and long-term solution to the situation of disadvantaged groups in the field of health at the national level.

In particular, the objectives of Healthy Regions are: to reduce barriers to access to health care (including increasing access to health care services and awareness of health care and prevention among the population of marginalised Roma communities (MRC)); to increase health literacy (including increasing health awareness among the population of MRC); to improve health-related behaviour (in particular to reduce risky lifestyles).

One of the mainstay activities in this direction is the implementation of the national Healthy Communities Project through the Implementation of Health Promotion Assistants in Hospital Settings (HPAs), which has been ongoing since 2017 and is one of the bridging measures aimed at improving access to mainstream health services for MRC residents.

With regard to **the recommendation to continue and strengthen efforts to protect the rights of persons with disabilities in the use of health care services,** there have been several changes in the Health Care Act. The adoption of a legal regulation on the use of restraints, a catalogue of patients' rights in in-patient psychiatric care facilities and the obligation to have internal rules of procedure determining the daily routine of patients admitted to in-patient psychiatric care facilities were adopted in 2023. The obligation to inform the person close to the patient and the legal representative of the use of restraints has also been introduced as part of the regulation of the use of restraints.

Regarding the advance questions from United States of America concerning the steps which government of the Slovak Republic is taking to **end the requirement that individuals seeking legal gender recognition undergo permanent sterilization** and **ensure access to specialized health care for transgender persons**.

The process of transition, which is referred to in our legislation as 'gender reassignment', consists of two parts - medical transition and legal transition (change od legal identity).

With regard to the change of legal identity, the Slovak republic complies with the current legislation, pursuant to which the change of legal identity, name, surname and birth number of a natural person shall take place on the basis of a thorough assessment of objective data, with the primary prerequisite of such a thorough assessment being an expert medical opinion/certificate confirming, that the change of transition is medically indicated.

This is an issue that the MoI and the MoH are currently working intensively on.

|  |
| --- |
| **Closing Remarks** |

Mr President, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The delegation of Slovakia was here today at the UPR for the fourth time, to present to you what we have achieved in the field of human rights but also, and more importantly, to listen to your suggestions and recommendations for further improvement of human rights in Slovakia. We welcome recommendations that we have received at this review. All your comments, questions and concrete recommendations provide an important guidance to national authorities.

Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, which I represent, is a core institution in Slovakia for the human rights agenda and was responsible for the implementation of most of the UPR recommendations. Let me assure you, that the Government and all its relevant institutions will cooperate to ensure the highest level of the implementation of all human rights obligations across the country. Minister of Justice is the chairperson of the Government Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality. The Council, with all its representatives - national human rights institution, civil society and other partners, will be invited to participate in the implementation of the UPR recommendations.

Allow me, on behalf of all the Members of the Delegation of the Slovak Republic, to express our sincere appreciation for the work done by the Secretariat of the Working Group for the Universal Periodic Review, to all member states of the Working Group as well as all the UN Member States who have taken time to formulate recommendations to Slovakia.

Let me assure you, that Slovakia will continue playing an active role in international human rights fora including by sharing our own experience and best practices.

1. (Police after being called to the site, can **expel a violent person from a shared household** (irrespective of ownership or residency status) **for 14 days**,

	* + - * **within 24 hours after expulsion is police obliged to forward victims´ contact information to the relevant intervention centre** in their region,
	* if a child is present, police is obliged to notify social protection of children and social guardianship services,
	* **intervention centre contacts victims within 72 hours** and offers them help, victims can decide whether they want help or assistance (and extent of help) from intervention centre,
	* police should check with victim during the expulsion period whether the violent person returned and **shall provide victim with protection**,
	* if victims decide to submit a proposal for a barring order, **the period of expulsion is extended until the relevant court issues a decision on the barring orde**r.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. V prípade potreby možné vynechať. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. V prípade potreby možné vynechať. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)