



**International Convention on
the Elimination of All Forms
of Racial Discrimination**

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Summary record of the 2217th meeting

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Chairperson: Mr. Avtonomov

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined ninth and tenth periodic reports of Slovakia (CERD/C/SVK/9-10; CERD/C/SVK/Q/9-10; HRI/CORE/1/Add.120)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Slovakia took places at the Committee table.*
2. **The Chairperson** commended the State party on the timely submission of its report. He welcomed the inclusion in the delegation of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, which would give the Committee the opportunity to obtain valuable first-hand information on the situation of the Roma in Slovakia.
3. **Mr. Rosocha** (Slovakia), introducing his country's ninth and tenth periodic reports, said that there had been a number of legislative and institutional changes since the preparation of the reports in 2012. Under amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Act due to come into effect on 1 April 2013, all public administration bodies and other legal entities would be able to adopt temporary special measures aimed at eliminating disadvantages based on racial or ethnic origin, membership of a national minority or ethnic group, gender, sex, age or disability, with a view to ensuring equal employment opportunities.
4. In 2012, the Government had set up the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for National Minorities to preserve, develop and support the rights of members of national minorities and implement measures to improve their status. The Office of the Plenipotentiary monitored, analysed and evaluated respect for the rights of national minorities on the part of government bodies, local authorities and other entities. It was involved in the preparation of reports on compliance with international treaties covering the status and rights of members of national minorities to which Slovakia was a party, and prepared opinions and proposals concerning legislative and non-legislative measures relating to the status and rights of members of minorities. The Plenipotentiary's first annual report to the Government was due in March 2013.
5. The Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities was involved in the creation, implementation and coordination of Government and European Union (EU) policies on Roma issues. That Plenipotentiary proposed, implemented and controlled measures adopted in coordination with central and local government bodies, local authorities and NGOs. In cooperation with institutional stakeholders and the competent authorities, the Plenipotentiary prepared, assigned, coordinated, monitored and evaluated programmes that reflected priority areas of support as defined in the Roma Integration Strategy up to 2020.
6. In the area of education, the main focus was on monitoring the admission of pupils to special primary schools and preventing any signs of discrimination or segregation of children from socially disadvantaged environments. Under the Slovak education system, all children had equal status. Activities that contributed to the elimination of the adverse effects of any form of exclusion and segregation of Roma pupils from others on the basis of their racial identity were given priority. The State education programme incorporated mandatory multicultural education from pre-primary to secondary level, with the objective of developing awareness of different cultures and subcultures, and acceptance and tolerance of cultural diversity as a social reality.
7. Under a 2011 amendment to the Use of National Minority Languages Act, options for the use of those languages had been significantly expanded, thereby strengthening the legal basis for the use of their languages by members of minorities. The Government Office

of the Slovak Republic submitted biannual reports on the use of minority languages to the Government; the first had been discussed by the Government in December 2012. The right of persons belonging to national minorities and ethnic groups living in Slovakia to receive information in their mother tongue through public service broadcasting was also ensured.

8. One of the objectives of the Roma Integration Strategy was to improve access to job opportunities, with special emphasis on proactive policies and programmes focused on the labour market, adult education, training and support for self-employment.

9. The Government undertook targeted data-gathering and monitoring as the basis for improving public policies and actions. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family participated in the Integration Evaluation Tool project of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the aim of which was to help improve integration of foreign beneficiaries of international protection in Slovakia. The Government carried out statistical monitoring of the living conditions of marginalized Roma communities. The Ministry of Labour also dealt with issues relating to the successful integration of foreigners in Slovakia. In addition to the preparation and mainstreaming of a new integration policy, work was under way to mainstream labour market access as an essential prerequisite for successful economic integration. New legislation in that area had introduced an EU Blue Card, which entitled the holder to work in a high-qualification occupation in Slovakia and eliminated the work permit requirement for foreigners subject to supplementary protection and tolerated residence arrangements.

10. Slovakia did not have, and had never had, a Government-led policy that in any way advocated the sterilization of any population group, which was illegal. Under the Health Care Act, sterilization was only permitted on the basis of written consent by either a person with full legal capacity or a legal representative of a person without the capacity to give informed consent. Since 2011, written consent had also been acceptable in the Roma language.

11. The second stage of the 2009–2015 programme to support the health of disadvantaged communities was now under way and continued to target selected segregated Roma settlements and locations where the health and hygiene situation was most critical. The programme was being implemented through community workers specialized in health education, whose duty was to facilitate communication between the populations of segregated and separated Roma settlements and doctors, nurses, midwives and public health workers, and to raise basic health awareness in those communities. The Ministry of Health, working together with the Roma Union Party, had prepared promotional and information materials regarding mandatory vaccinations in the Roma language and distributed them in cooperation with an NGO.

12. A system of economic instruments to support housing development, including subsidies for the procurement of social rental flats, had been set up with the aim of ensuring access to housing for low-income and vulnerable groups, including members of marginalized Roma communities. A “positive discrimination” approach had been adopted towards persons liable to social exclusion, which meant that projects for target groups received higher subsidies from the State budget.

13. An amendment to the Criminal Code was to come into effect in March 2013, introducing heavier penalties for offences involving extremism and extending the scope of offences to hate offences motivated by racial or cultural identity. The amendments aimed to strengthen counter-extremism efforts through more efficient repression and investigation of extremist crime.

14. His Government had concluded agreements with UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration. Slovakia was one of three countries in the world engaging in

the humanitarian refugee transfer programme, under which refugees were temporarily placed in Slovakia before their long-term resettlement in a safe third country.

15. In June 2011, the Government had approved the Concept of the Fight against Extremism, whose objective was to establish an efficient system of measures and activities to protect society from antisocial conduct on the part of extremist individuals, groups and movements. A draft Concept of the Fight against Spectator Violence for 2013–2016 had also been prepared; it was primarily focused on halting expressions of racism and extremism at sports events.

16. In March 2012, the Multidisciplinary Integrated Expert Group had been recast as the Interdepartmental Expert Working Group, whose focus was on the elimination of racially motivated crime and extremism.

17. **Mr. Pollák** (Slovakia) said that the most important elements of the legislative framework for preventing discrimination and protecting human rights in his country included the Constitution of 1992 and generally binding legal instruments, such as the Anti-Discrimination Act of 2004. International conventions formed part of the Slovak legal order and had precedence over national laws.

18. The protection of the human rights of the Roma community was considered an important element of the Government's policy on Roma integration. As Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, he was actively involved in drafting systematic measures and government programmes in cooperation with State bodies, local governments, NGOs and churches. In cases of violations of the rights of Roma, he provided individuals with assistance in obtaining a remedy, including mediation, legal assistance and intervention by the State. The experience gained in that area was then applied to the drafting of strategic papers and legislation.

19. The legal framework designed to prevent discrimination was adequate, but there were still shortcomings in its implementation. There was a need to increase awareness within the Roma communities in order to protect them from discrimination and focus on eliminating gender inequality. Due to the continued lack of ethnically specific data, it was difficult to accurately estimate the level of discrimination against the Roma population. The recently approved amendment to the Anti-Discrimination Act would resolve those shortcomings.

20. His Government was committed to improving the situation of the Roma community in four main interconnected areas: housing, education, health and employment. It recognized the need to create the conditions for quality education for all children. Housing was one of the areas where the differences between the Roma and the majority population were most pronounced. The extremely poor conditions in which segregated communities lived resulted in ill health, and the Government aimed to address the challenge of reducing the discrepancy between the health of the Roma community and that of the majority population. It was determined to support processes aimed at ensuring the socioeconomic inclusion of the Roma community. Its Roma Integration Strategy was an open document that would be supplemented by further action plans.

21. The Government was also aware of the need to focus on changing public perceptions of the Roma people, which tended to stereotype the Roma as socially incorrigible. In addition, it was necessary to provide the poorest marginalized communities with access to basic financial services and improve their financial skills. His Office would be submitting to the Government two action plans aimed at ensuring financial inclusion of the Roma and improving their public image.

22. Roma issues could not be addressed without the participation of the Roma themselves at the local, regional and national levels. While programmes were in place, it was necessary to ensure greater involvement of the Roma in their implementation.

23. **Mr. Kemal** (Country Rapporteur) said that the recommendations contained in the Committee's previous concluding observations on Slovakia (CERD/C/SVK/CO/6-8) remained valid. Although the State party had made some efforts to collect disaggregated data, much remained to be done in order to compile sufficient data for use as a tool in tackling the economic and social problems of the minorities. According to Amnesty International, the State party had failed to collect disaggregated data on race and ethnicity in the form the Committee required.

24. Noting the establishment of the Committee for the Prevention and Elimination of Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance in 2011, he requested details on the exact status and activities of that body. Referring to the statistics on racially motivated and extremist crimes presented in paragraphs 56–78 of the report, he asked what conclusions the State party drew from them.

25. The Committee remained concerned that the State party's legal provisions, programmes and policies to eliminate racial discrimination were not being fully implemented. He noted that the Roma Integration Strategy had been replaced by a new strategy entitled Roma Reform in April 2012, but that few measures had been introduced to date; he invited the delegation to comment on that situation, which was a cause for major concern.

26. The Committee was concerned at the increase in racially motivated attacks, including anti-Semitic violence and violence targeting Roma and non-EU migrants, sometimes perpetrated by neo-Nazi skinhead groups. It was also concerned about prejudice against Roma and Hungarians. It had recommended in its previous concluding observations that the State party should duly investigate, prosecute and punish all such acts. Furthermore, the Committee's attention had been drawn to the ill-treatment of Roma by law enforcement officials and it had highlighted the need to ensure the effective implementation of the relevant Ministry of the Interior regulations.

27. In response to the Committee's recommendation that the State party should adopt special recruitment measures to increase the number of Roma serving in the police force, it had indicated that all Slovak nationals had an equal right to be admitted to the police on the basis of an entrance examination and that no statistical information on the racial origins of police officers was available. Against that background, he noted that where the playing field was not level, reliance on merit as defined by the majority tended to favour more powerful groups. Unless weaker segments were temporarily given special preference, the chances of overcoming a structural handicap were close to zero.

28. One of the more serious problems that should be addressed was the segregation of Roma children in education. He asked the delegation for further information on Government plans to provide compulsory preschool education for Roma children and encouraged the Government to adopt any special measure that would provide them with quality education. What resources would the Government deploy to achieve the target of desegregation in schools throughout the country?

29. Reports of forced evictions and the demolition of Roma housing, in addition to the resistance of the majority population to the presence of Roma communities in their midst, posed a serious problem. Although the Government was attempting to address the issue of housing for Roma, it remained a matter of concern to the Committee.

30. The delegation had clearly asserted that forced sterilization was unacceptable; however, some injustices had been committed in the past. The Government might wish to

consider providing compensation for injustices that might have occurred as a result of lack of informed consent. The Committee would welcome the delegation's views on how that problem could be overcome.

31. Given that very few asylum seekers were granted asylum, he wished to know whether those not granted asylum were deported. Lastly, he observed that the fact that no complaints about racial discrimination had been lodged did not mean that racism did not exist.

32. **Mr. Murillo Martínez** said the report indicated that there had been an alarming increase in racial hate crimes in 2011. Despite significant efforts by the State party, the situation appeared to be out of control. He asked the delegation to indicate the possible causes of that increase and to state how the Government addressed the issue at the wider European level.

33. He requested further information on affirmative measures being taken under the Action Plan (CERD/C/SVK/9-10, paras. 32 et seq.). Did they include measures to promote participation, including political participation, and action that would help Roma in that regard? How were such measures implemented in other spheres, such as the executive or the judiciary?

34. While the State party had been implementing measures for the most vulnerable groups, the Committee would appreciate more in-depth information on the situation of Roma with regard to housing, since the report recognized that Roma housing was substandard.

35. Lastly, he asked whether the State party envisaged conducting a periodic survey, such as a census, in the near future in the context of measures to combat racism and racial hatred.

36. **Mr. de Gouttes** said that he wished to congratulate the Government on its declaration on article 14 of the Convention relating to individual complaints.

37. In connection with the sterilization of Roma women, he asked what new measures had been introduced since the consideration of the State party's previous report in 2010 in order to prevent acts of racist violence, including anti-Semitic violence and violence targeting Roma and non-EU migrants. Furthermore, with reference to the Committee's concluding observations of 2010, he asked what new efforts were aimed at combating prejudice against Roma, Hungarians and other minorities and what had been done to combat the segregation of Roma children in the fields of education and health. In addition, he requested further information on the status of the document on integration and migration policy to 2020 and the related action plan mentioned in paragraph 19 of the report.

38. The report indicated that special provisions had been incorporated in the Criminal Code in 2009 to strengthen measures against extremist activities, groups and material and the definition of extremist criminal acts. The fact that extremism was not clearly defined in the Criminal Code meant that the Code was not fully in line with article 4 of the Convention.

39. He asked the delegation to provide further information on the decrees amending the Action Plan for the Prevention of All Forms of Discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Other Expressions of Intolerance for the period 2012–2014, and on the role of the Ombudsman, whose mandate appeared to be limited to human rights violations by the authorities. In addition, he wished to know why no complaints of racial or ethnic discrimination had been received.

40. The report provided useful information on the number of racially motivated crimes committed since 2009; it would be useful to learn about any follow-up to complaints about such crimes and if there had been convictions in such cases.

41. The report recognized that Roma housing did not meet technical or hygienic standards and was often constructed without permits. Had new measures been introduced to improve that situation?

42. Lastly, the Committee would welcome information on the number of convictions in cases of racial or ethnic discrimination, and on remedies and redress for victims of such discrimination.

43. **Mr. Diaconu** said it was obvious that the State party was making serious efforts to give effect to the Committee's recommendations. He noted that the statistical and demographic data contained in the report focused on Roma to the exclusion of other groups, such as Hungarians, Czechs and Moravians. Were they recognized as minorities? Did they speak different languages? If so, were education and media available in those languages? What were the rights of Croatian and German minorities?

44. In addressing criminal acts covered by article 4, a discussion of terms and notions such as extremism and crimes against humanity could lead to confusion and was beyond the purview of the Convention. It was also important to avoid creating confusion in the use of language: paragraph 29 of the report referred to "unjustified" non-equal treatment, which appeared to suggest that non-equal treatment might in some cases be considered justified.

45. The statistics contained in the report indicated that the police had recorded a growing number of acts of a racist nature from 2008 to 2011. He asked the delegation to explain that increase and indicate the measures taken to reverse the trend. The report indicated that gaps in the law meant that demonstrations which degenerated into racist gatherings could not be prevented; if that was the case, legislation must be improved in order to address such situations.

46. The situation of the Roma was nothing new; structural discrimination against that group had been inherited. In connection with housing, it would be helpful if the delegation could provide figures indicating the number of Roma living in improvised camps. With regard to the recruitment of Roma in the police, it appeared unlikely that no Roma were able to pass the relevant examinations; a number attended universities or police academies, and Roma served as police officers in other countries. The authorities should find ways of recruiting Roma police officers, particularly for the policing of Roma communities.

47. He had also noted that in Slovakia walls continued to be built in order to separate groups of people and asked whether there was no other way to resolve inter-community problems. Building walls increased segregation, as did the policy of constructing buildings specifically for Roma; that policy should be revised to integrate Roma within the general population. Furthermore, the Government should take measures to tackle the demolition of Roma camps by some local groups. Segregation in education was prohibited but continued.

48. The adoption of the Roma Integration Strategy was commendable. Did the Strategy establish time frames for action, and deadlines for resolving the problems of housing, education and the protection of women? The progress made with regard to the representation of Roma in local assemblies was encouraging and it was hoped that their inclusion would lead to more non-discriminatory policies.

49. The State party had adopted an amendment to the Nationality Act in response to Hungarian legislation that granted Hungarian nationality to applicants swiftly and without excessive formalities. However, the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union were concerned that the Slovak legislation did not eradicate statelessness. In order to avoid problems with those Courts, therefore, the Slovak authorities

should ascertain that persons from whom it intended to withdraw Slovak nationality were able to obtain Hungarian nationality.

50. Some reports had indicated that complainants in discrimination cases found it hard to prove in court that there had been discrimination. The State party could remedy that situation by reversing the burden of proof, so that the defendant would be required to prove that there had been no discrimination.

51. While he understood that the Government had never pursued a policy of sterilization, hospitals continued to perform such operations; the European Court of Human Rights had handed down decisions in three cases in recent years. Could that practice simply be prohibited in order to prevent such situations from arising in the future?

52. He noted that, by adopting a law on discrimination, the State party aimed to put into effect the EU's Racial Equality Directive. Were there aspects of that Directive that the domestic legislation on discrimination did not cover? And were there aspects of the European Directive that made it difficult to put the Committee's recommendations into practice?

53. **Mr. Calí Tzay** said, with reference to paragraph 52 of the report, that he concurred with those members of the Committee who had noted that the definition of extremism in Slovak legislation was ambiguous and not entirely satisfactory. Given that extremism was increasing, legislation and prosecution in such cases were essential, and action was needed to eradicate racial, national and ethnic hatred and intolerance. The Committee would like to hear more about cases involving expressions of intolerance and hatred – not only complaints but cases brought to trial. To which national or ethnic groups did the perpetrators of those acts of intolerance or extremism belong?

54. Although the Committee had heard that there was no racial segregation policy in Slovakia, it had received information from two sources that dividing-walls were being built under a municipal order in the school district of Prešov to ensure that certain children in certain streets attended certain schools, with the effect that one school was almost entirely attended by Roma children. What action was the State party taking to prevent orders of that kind? Was the State party prepared to take measures to reduce the number of Roma children in special schools and to ensure that disabled Roma children were not discriminated against and could be integrated into mainstream schools?

55. Although sterilization was not State policy, in his view the State remained the guarantor of human rights. If it was aware that women were being sterilized without their consent in hospitals, was the State not becoming complicit in the sterilizations effected in those hospitals? He asked the delegation to indicate how legal capacity was defined and whether it would entail the ability to read and write Slovak. Did Roma women who were not literate in Slovak have access to a translator or interpreter? Were consent forms for sterilization and other documents that they were required to sign written in a language that they could understand?

56. **Mr. Vázquez** said that he appreciated the Government's acknowledgement of the need to protect the human rights of Roma and that more needed to be done in that regard. However, the dialogue appeared to be taking place at the national level while the problems existed at the local level. Could more be done to ensure that initiatives at the national level were implemented and enforced at the local level, particularly as local officials appeared to be seeking more guidance?

57. He noted that some officials, including senior officials, failed to take sufficient account of the systemic, structural discrimination against Roma. Such bias could constitute an obstacle to resolving the problem of the segregation of Roma children in education. There were in fact two distinct types of segregation: Roma were either segregated into

special schools or segregated within mainstream schools. A disproportionate number of Roma children attended special schools; one reason for that could be that the tests of their eligibility were often based on subjective criteria, such as communication skills, that could disadvantage the minority population. As to Roma segregated from other children in mainstream schools, there had been cases in which Roma parents collected their children before other parents in order to avoid contact between them. In some cases, Roma children had been required to eat in corridors while non-Roma children ate in the school refectory. Such situations obviously gave cause for concern.

58. The fact that municipal funds were used for the construction of walls separating Roma and non-Roma communities was also troubling. Although the Office of the Ombudsman had found that such walls did not violate the rights and freedoms of the Roma, the Committee would appreciate further information on that issue, as it was of significant concern in relation to article 3 of the Convention.

59. In the light of several reported cases of police brutality and mistreatment of members of the Roma community, including children, he asked whether criminal action had been brought against the officials concerned and, if so, what the outcomes had been. Pursuant to the State party's response to the Committee's 2010 recommendation that the State party should take special measures to increase the representation of Roma in the police force, he recalled that article 1, paragraph 4, of the Convention specified that special measures did not constitute racial discrimination.

60. The former chairman of the Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality appeared to be one of the few Government officials to have spoken out publicly against anti-Roma rhetoric and to have welcomed the European Court of Human Rights rulings regarding Slovakia. It would be interesting to learn whether the departure of the former chairman reflected a difference of opinion between him and the Government concerning the strategies that should be used to combat racial and ethnic discrimination in the State party.

61. **Mr. Amir** commended the State party for its regular submission of reports to the Committee. Given the efforts of the Government to integrate the Roma, and the increasing number of people in the State party who were identifying themselves as Roma, he asked whether steps were being taken to ensure that a minimum standard of living was assured in Roma settlements. He would welcome information on the attitude of the mainstream population towards the Roma community and, in particular, views about the comprehensive integration of the Roma into non-Roma society.

62. He requested additional information on the plight of the children of asylum seekers and other foreigners in detention centres. Were they held in detention centres with their parents and, if so, were they able to attend school?

63. It would be useful to learn whether any right-wing extremist groups had opposed the implementation of the 2011 amendment criminalizing the public denial, doubting or approval of the Holocaust or attempts to excuse it. He asked whether there were any public symbols or monuments in the State party recognizing the atrocities that had been committed against the Roma community during the Holocaust.

64. He would appreciate additional information on the curriculum and qualifications available to Roma children who attended school. It would be useful to know whether Roma school leavers enjoyed the same level of access to the labour market as their non-Roma peers. He also enquired whether the Holocaust was on the history curriculum in all schools and universities, and whether students were taught about the atrocities that had been committed against several ethnic groups during that period and what should be learned in terms of the need for integration.

65. **Mr. Pollák** (Slovakia) said that his Government was aware of the need to gather data disaggregated by ethnic background in order to be able to measure the effectiveness of its policies; it planned to work with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to that end.

66. The Roma Reform was not a new strategy; it was a package of legislative measures that would be presented to parliament for adoption in an attempt to address the problems faced by the Roma community. The Roma Reform included efforts to integrate members of that community into the police force.

67. The December 2011 ruling by the Prešov district court ordering the elementary school in the village of Šarisské Michaľany to desegregate Roma classes had been a landmark decision. A working group had been set up to decide how to implement the ruling. To date, only three parents had withdrawn their children from the school in question, despite the fact that all parents in Slovakia could choose which school their children attended. The proposal to introduce compulsory preschool attendance applied not only to the Roma community, but to all children who were regarded as being at risk.

68. Housing was the largest single problem for the Roma community in Slovakia. Many of their homes had been built on land owned by individuals to whom the property deeds had been restored after the fall of Communism. While such illegal buildings had been demolished in some towns, the Roma Reform included draft legislation to address that situation, notably by setting up schemes enabling the Roma to eventually purchase the land concerned.

69. There were 120,000–150,000 people living in Roma settlements that lacked running water, sewage disposal or access roads. The Government would allocate resources from EU funding in the period 2014–2017 to improve the infrastructure of those settlements. Studies were under way into how many Roma settlements remained on land that had not been legally acquired. Steps would be taken to encourage the Roma to participate in efforts to resolve that issue by purchasing the land concerned.

70. The sterilization of Roma women had never been official Government policy; such sterilizations had been carried out by individual doctors and hospitals, which were responsible for any failings.

71. The level of representation of the Roma community had increased at both the municipal and local levels in recent years. There were now some 20 Roma mayors, about 200 Roma members of local governments and 2 Roma members of regional governments; he himself had become the first Roma member of parliament in March 2012.

72. The Government had allocated funds to efforts to change the attitude of the non-Roma population towards the Roma community. Roma Holocaust Remembrance Day had been observed on 2 August 2012 by a minute of silence in the National Council.

73. The Government advised municipal authorities that, while building walls around Roma settlements might provide short-term solutions to problems, the practice was prejudicial to all concerned in the longer term. The Government took steps to raise awareness among municipal officials of the need for integration, but it could not interfere in the mandate of the municipal councils. He pointed out that few such walls had been built.

74. **Mr. Kemal** asked whether there were many role models of successful members of the Roma community in the State party. It would be useful to know what percentage of children the State party planned to integrate into its plans for compulsory preschooling, and what financial resources were available for that purpose. He asked why the current Government had chosen not to implement the Slovak Roma Integration Strategy, which had been developed in consultation with the World Bank, UNDP and Slovak civil society.

75. **Ms. Dah** asked what the Government considered to be the key to ensuring the success of its ambitious Roma Reform. It would be useful to learn what impact the economic crisis in Europe would have on the Government's reform plans, given its apparent reliance on EU funds.

76. **Mr. Pollák** (Slovakia) said that many members of the Roma community had been successful in their chosen fields, such as medicine, law and the civil service. Unfortunately, such positive examples were not publicized by the media. Compulsory preschooling should provide a solid foundation for Roma children and other children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, enabling them to enter the education system on an equal footing with their contemporaries. No official figures were available on the number of Roma children who would be included in that scheme; he estimated that some 10,000 might be eligible.

77. The Roma Integration Strategy was the Government paper on which the Roma Reform had been based. The Reform had been backed by a coalition of the major political party in power and the Roma party. There was no single key to the success of the Reform. Education was extremely important, but children needed decent homes in order to be able to make the most of their education. It was therefore necessary to take a comprehensive approach to the situation of the Roma, including efforts to improve education, housing, health and employment and to tackle poverty. While the financial crisis in Europe had reduced the amount of funding the Government could allocate to the Roma Reform, efforts were being redoubled to ensure that every euro spent achieved real results.

78. **The Chairperson** asked whether the Slovak Roma language existed in written form and, if so, whether it was taught in schools.

79. **Mr. Pollák** (Slovakia) said that a written form did exist, but it was not widely used by the Slovak Roma population. There were some publications in that language, and it was taught in one private elementary school, several high schools and at university level. There were some five dialects of the Slovak Roma language.

80. **Mr. Kemal** asked whether the teaching of the Slovak Roma language was a priority.

81. **Mr. Amir** asked whether Slovak Roma was a true language, given that it comprised five different dialects.

82. **Mr. Pollák** (Slovakia) said that the preservation of the Roma language was an important cultural aspect of the preservation of the Slovak Roma nation. Significant efforts were made to ensure the continuous development of the language in its purest form. In his opinion, Roma children should learn Roma as their mother tongue and Slovak as a second language. In 2008, an agreement had been reached on the standardized form of the language, which was the dialect that was spoken by the majority of Slovak Roma.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.