In Bratislava, 30 November 2021

**INPUT OF THE SLOVAK NATIONAL CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE IN RELATION TO HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL RESOLUTION 47/24 ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

*About the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights:*

*The Slovak National Centre for Human Rights (hereinafter the “Centre”) is a national human rights institution established in the Slovak Republic, accredited with status B by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). As an NHRI, the Centre is a member of the European Network of NHRIs (ENNHRI). The Centre was established by the Act of Slovak National Council No. 308/1993 Coll. on the Establishment of Slovak National Centre for Human Rights. Pursuant to the Act No. 365/2004 Coll. on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and on Protection from Discrimination, as amended (the Anti-Discrimination Act), the Centre also acts as the only Slovak equality body. As an NHRI and equality body, the Centre performs a wide range of tasks in the field of protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms including the observance of the principle of equal treatment.*

*The Centre among other powers:*

*1) monitors and evaluates the observance of human rights and the observance of equal treatment principle;*

*2) gathers and, upon request, provides information on racism, xenophobia and antisemitism in the Slovak Republic;*

*3) conducts research and surveys to provide data in the field of human rights; gathers and distributes information in this area;*

*4) prepares educational activities and participates in information campaigns aimed at increasing tolerance of the society;*

*5) provides legal assistance to victims of discrimination and manifestations of intolerance;*

*6) issues expert opinions on matters concerning the observance of the equal treatment principle;*

*7) performs independent inquiries related to discrimination;*

*8) prepares and publishes reports and recommendations on issues related to discrimination; and provides library services and other services in the field of human rights.*

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**The Centre submits the following input to the Questionnaire in relation to Human Rights Council resolution 47/24 on human rights and climate change:**

1. **Please describe the impacts of the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations. Where possible, please share specific examples and stories.**

Climate change and its adverse effects on the people belonging to vulnerable groups has increased over the time. Climate change can hinder the effective exercise of various human rights, such as the right to life, and right to health, right to food or right to water. Older people, women, children and persons with health disability are among the most vulnerable groups, who are at greater risk of negative effects of climate change, due to, for example, their increased vulnerabilities to health problems, or social and economic factors, such as isolation or reduced mobility, and limited access to services.

One of the obvious impacts of climate change is the rise in temperature and warming of the climate resulting in a series of temperature extremes or other extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts. In particular, the challenges created as the result of climate change range most often from drought, or increasing dangers of floods. The increase in the average global temperature impacts the health and wellbeing of all persons, but can have serious negative effects on vulnerable groups, such as older people, in particular. For instance, older people are more vulnerable to the series of extreme weather events, as the mortality risk is significantly higher for this group.

In fact, the series of heat days above 30 °C (classified as “tropical days”) and above 35 °C (classified as supertropical days) cause high risk of health complications or even deaths especially to vulnerable groups, such as seniors, children, pregnant women and homeless people. The longest series of tropical days was monitored by Slovak hydrometeorological institute in 2013 when there was a period of 50 tropical days (an average value for the whole country). In summer 2018 there was a period of 21 tropical days. The series of supertropical days are still not so common in the Slovak Republic, the longest period was monitored in 2015 and it lasted 10 - 11 days.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Moreover, according to the press releases of the Slovak emergency ambulance service in the period between July 13th and August 10th 2020, there were 1454 cases of emergency interventions in cases of heat collapse. Although emergency services and health authorities stipulate higher risk of heat collapse for children and seniors, there are no official statistics available to evaluate the number of cases for specific vulnerable groups, such as the older persons.

Elderly people are also more vulnerable to effects of stresses on the supply of food, or access to water supplies. In terms of access to food, higher incidence and impact of extreme weather (drought, heavy rainfalls, extreme changes of temperature) has an impact on rising price of local food (food from domestic production) as well as the ability to breed out own crops. At the same time, the index of material deprivation of elderly (65+) is 18,9 % (2019) in comparison to 15,9 % of the total population. From the gender perspective, 20,8 % of women live in material deprivation in comparison with 15,9 % of men[[2]](#footnote-2). There is a high probability that elderly women will more likely feel the negative impact of increased prices of food.

Although the Slovak Republic has currently sufficient groundwater supplies to cover its needs, climate change has reduced the total annual precipitation by 5,0 % in the last hundred years (by 10 % in southern regions) and the supplies therefore fell by approximately 10 % (due to increased temperatures). Consequences are significant for elderly people, as they often cover a part of their food needs by their own crop production. Long periods of drought will increase the demand for irrigation, but a relatively high number of elderly people don't have access to public water supply. Moreover, there are no regular tests of the well water that people use and there is higher risk of health problems caused by polluted water.

1. **Please describe any specific policy, legislation, practice or strategy that your Government has undertaken, in compliance with applicable international human rights law, to promote an approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as loss and damage that ensures the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations. Please also note and identify any relevant mechanisms for ensuring accountability for these commitments including their means of implementation.**

The environmental challenges in Slovakia require a long-term vision and strategic direction. The new Strategy of the Environmental Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 (“Envirostrategy 2030”)[[3]](#footnote-3) was the result of the need for a new and modern environmental policy strategy, which would reflect the actual situation and urgent problems of the environment. The adopted Envirostrategy 2030 defines a vision until 2030, which takes into account a possible, probable, and the desired future development, identifies the fundamental systemic problems, sets the objectives until 2030 and proposes a framework for measures to improve the current situation. In addition, it also contains basic result indicators that will enable a verification of achieved results.

The basic goal of Envirostrategy 2030 is to achieve better environmental quality and sustainable circulation of the economy, which is based on rigorous protection of environmental compartments and using as little non-renewable natural resources and hazardous substances as possible, which will lead to an improvement in health of the population. Environmental protection and sustainable consumption will be part of the general awareness of citizens and policy makers. According to the Envirostrategy 2030, through the prevention and adaptation to climate change, the consequences will be as subdued as possible in Slovakia.

In this regard, in order to reduce the progress of climate change, the Slovak Republic focuses on the prevention and reduction of its impacts, by adopting mitigation measures aimed at, for example, limiting the amount of greenhouse gases emission into the atmosphere, as well as increasing carbon sequestration.[[4]](#footnote-4) According to the Low-Carbon Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 with a View to 2050,[[5]](#footnote-5) efficient and cost-effective measures will be proposed, especially in the areas of transport, energy efficiency, industrial production and power engineering. One of the instruments for climate change mitigation will be the implementation of measures in specific areas based on the action plan of the updated Adaptation Strategy of the Slovak Republic on the Adverse Impacts of Climate Change, as well as on the action plan to address the consequences of drought and water scarcity.

In addition, the Slovak Republic also adopted a number of policy documents recognizing the negative impact of climate change on the specific vulnerable groups. According to the National Environmental and Health Action Plan of the Slovak Republic V. (2020 - 2030)[[6]](#footnote-6), the most vulnerable groups reacting to climate change are elderly people, people with chronic diseases, pregnant women, children and employees working outside. One of the priorities in the National Environmental and Health Action Plan of the Slovak Republic V. (2020-2030) is to strengthen the adaptability and resilience to health risks related to climate change and supporting measures to mitigate climate change and achieve participation on health in relation to the Paris Agreement. Understanding the threats posed by climate change to human health is the first step in working together to reduce negative impacts and risks and increase adaptability. According to the National Environmental and Health Action Plan of the Slovak Republic V (2020-2030), taking steps to reduce vulnerability, apply an inter-ministerial approach, raising awareness among health professionals, but also the general public, and strengthening and securing the necessary infrastructure is crucial. Activities taken to reduce the vulnerability and adaptability of the population should be aimed primarily at reducing the effects of heat during the summer or cold during the winter, reducing the effects of air pollution (summer and winter smog), reducing health effects during floods, anticipating changes in diseases vector-borne, reducing the risk of infectious and water-related diseases, ensuring food safety, educating about overexposure to UV radiation and preventing the occurrence of allergens. Within this area, the action plan foresees the aim of systematically preparing for the impact of climate change, reducing vulnerabilities and increasing the adaptive capacity of citizens, health professionals, public institutions and improving their awareness of climate change.

The notion of vulnerable group as possibly feeling the negative impact of climate change on full enjoyment of their rights, especially the right to health and right to life was recognized in the Adaptation strategy of the Slovak Republic to climate change (2019 - 2025/2030).[[7]](#footnote-7) It has only one goal explicitly mentioning vulnerable groups as a target group in the Adaptation Strategy. In particular, it encourages adapting measures in the social sector to protect vulnerable groups (children, people with health problems, elderly), creating a system of warnings, social support and communication with citizens.

1. **Please share a summary of any relevant data that captures how the adverse effects of climate change have affected people in vulnerable situations, taking into account multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (i.e. discrimination based on a combination of multiple grounds, including disability, gender, race, colour, sex, language, religion, nationality and migration status).**

Access to water supply

Given that one the most significant impact of climate change in the Slovak Republic is the decline in groundwater levels and longer periods of meteorological and hydrological drought in some areas of the Slovak Republic, one of the important indicators is the supply of drinking water and the quality of drinking water. According to a report by the Public Health Authority of the Slovak Republic, in 2020, the quality of drinking water in large supply areas remained high in 2017-2019, which is also due to the fact that approximately 84% of the supplied drinking water comes from quality and less polluted groundwater resources. The most frequently exceeded microbiological indicators are Coliform bacteria and Cultivable microorganisms at 22°C, the presence of which may be related to the intersection of pollution with public water mains (water, soil, plants) but are also a reliable indicator of insufficient water treatment or disinfection often due to outage of public water supply.

According to the valid legislation, the Public Health Authority may grant an exemption to a public source of drinking water even if it exceeds the set limits (if no other source of drinking water is available and health is not endangered), such an exemption is reported to the European Commission only when supplying more than 5000 population.[[8]](#footnote-8)

As regards the drinking water supply of the population in relation to the incidence of infectious diseases transmitted by drinking water in the Slovak Republic (2008-2011), the national indicator points in particular to regional differences between the more developed western part of the country and other regions. In the Bratislava region, about 97% of the population is connected to the public water supply. In contrast, in the Prešov region, about 78% of the population is connected to public water supply. There are several reasons for not using public water supply, building and using own wells. On the one hand, in some areas, due to the nature of the country, there is no possibility to connect to the public water supply. On the other hand, people disconnect or do not use water from public water supplies in an effort to save money. In general, however, it can be said that the water quality in Slovakia is high. More than 80% of drinking water sources are groundwater, which is least exposed to the negative effects of pollution. This fact is also reflected in the incidence of epidemics and water-related infectious diseases. In the period 2008-2011, 25 cases were recorded in which drinking water from public water mains was a factor in the transmission of the infectious agent. In 234 cases of the disease, it was water from uncontrolled sources (mountain wells, streams, unsecured individual sources, etc.). Generally speaking, the incidence of water-related diseases is not high compared to the total population of Slovakia (5.435 million).

Marginalized Roma Communities

With regard to the adverse effects of climate change on persons belonging to marginalized Roma communities, it is important to highlight the occurrence and higher exposure to floods. According to the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019, the total number of settlements in municipalities amounted to 1052. Of these, the occurrence of floods is recorded in 270, while 235 of these settlements are located outside the municipality or on the outskirts of the municipality (Residents of such settlements are more often exposed to floods if they are pushed to the edge into floodplains).

Of these, 112 settlements report deteriorating air quality, 85 settlements are those where more than 50% of households heat with solid fuel. 786 settlements (out of the total number of settlements in municipalities) are those in which at least 80% of households have access to a public supply of drinking water, on the contrary, 210 settlements are those in which no or max 10% of households have access to a public water supply, which during summer period, when there are more frequent periods of heat, means that the members of the settlements do not have sufficient access to drinking water, the safety of which is controlled.

Heat waves

Due to the growing need of households to cope with weather fluctuations (especially summer heat through air conditioning, and low temperatures during winter, it is necessary to monitor energy poverty indices - analysis carried out by the Institute of Forecasting of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in 2020. They are not monitored and analyzed by the Slovak Statistical Office.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The heat of the summer months is already causing difficulties in Slovakia. When asked to what extent respondents bother a heated house or flat (with the possibility to answer on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant "it doesn't bother me at all" and 5 "it bothers me a lot"), 15.7% of respondents stated that the heated housing bothers them greatly. The average score reached 3.13. High scores - and thus a higher incidence of the problem with heated housing - were reported by people of retirement age (3.33), people from the Bratislava region (3.35) and people living in large cities with 50 to 100,000 inhabitants (3.42). and in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (3.55). Household income appears to be a key dividing line of experience with the negative effects of summer heat. While the average score for people living in households with a monthly income higher than 1800 euros was 3.06, for people living in households with less than 800 euros it was 3.42. 13.8% of the population uses air conditioning to maintain the optimal temperature in the apartment or house. 47.7% use shielding (external or internal) for this purpose. Other technologies or measures are more rare (3.3%), with fans predominating. Air conditioning is most often used by higher income groups (28.3% of people from households with an income of more than 1800 euros) and residents of the largest cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (19.8%) to achieve optimal temperatures in the summer. From the regional point of view, it is mainly in the case of Trnava (29.2%), Bratislava (24%) and Nitra regions (23.3%). Similar patterns can be observed when using shading, although in this case the differences between the different categories are smaller. Almost one third of respondents (32%) said they do not use any technology because they cannot afford it. This is most often the result of low incomes: up to half of people in households with an income below € 800 per month and 42.4% of people in households with an income of between € 800 and € 1,000 cannot afford to alleviate heat. For comparison, among people with a monthly household income over 1800 euros, this applies to 15.5%.

Impact of heat waves on vulnerable groups

The Impact of heat waves on human mortality is not monitored regularly in the Slovak Republic, however, we can assume how extensive this issue is based on a study published in 2016. According to the analyses of the excess mortality during heat events in the Slovak Republic in the period between 1996 and 2012, there was a total relative increase of 9,9 % (women +11,4%, man +8,5%, >70y + 11,3%) during heat days with air temperature above 90th percentile of its empirical distribution (i.e. during 10 % hottest days) and 13,3 % increase (women +14,5%, man +13,3%, >70y + 16,2%) during heat days above 95th percentile (i.e. 5 % hottest days). The approximate proportion of excess deaths in total excess mortality was 55% for women and 69% for the elderly (from 2,160 deaths during 176 days). The approximate proportion of excess deaths in total excess mortality during strong heat events was 50% for women and 71% for the elderly (1,530 deaths during 79 days).[[10]](#footnote-10).

1. **Please describe any mechanisms and tools that are in place to measure and monitor the impacts of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations.**

There are no specific monitoring tools to measure the impact of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights in Slovak Republic. The only systemic monitoring of climate change and related impact is being conducted by the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute. e.g.: Index of risk of fire, Meteorological drought, Hydrological drought, etc. Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute is also implementing/co-implementing several projects focused on monitoring, evaluation and evidence based strategic planning in the area of adaptation and mitigation of climate change. These include URANOS – Facts and knowledge based support of decision making and strategic planning in the field of adaptation of agriculture on climate change[[11]](#footnote-11) or Support of implementation of the programmes focused on increasing quality of air in Slovakia by capacity building on regional and municipal level.[[12]](#footnote-12)

1. **Please identify and share examples of good practices and challenges in the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations in the context of the adverse effects of climate change.**

Local strategies and action plans

Besides the national action plans and adaptation strategies, there are also numerous local strategies developed by towns and municipalities, and actions taken locally to specifically target and address the risks of the climate change in the area. For example, the Adaptability strategy of the town Trenčín to climate change issued in September 2019,[[13]](#footnote-13) also proposes to create a dispatching of social services, to increase the capacity of social service providers as the health effects of climate change affect vulnerable populations, including the elderly and the long-term sick. The adaptation measure is aimed at the places where these groups reside. Health complications are mainly caused by high temperatures, which strain the body and, in extreme cases, there is a risk of death. The creation of a dispatching center leads to the integration of the capacities of social services and to the simplification and acceleration of the processes associated with the procedural procedures for requesting a service. The gradual expansion of the capacities of providers of social services aimed at strengthening the field service enables the preservation of family ties of persons requiring social services with a direct impact on improving their quality of life.

The capital city and the municipality of Bratislava also has an Action plan for adaptation to adverse impacts of climate change in the territory of the capital city of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, for the period of 2017-2020 (“Action Plan for Bratislava”).[[14]](#footnote-14) The current Action Plan for Bratislava has been extended until 2023, until a new action plan is developed. A new action plan for adaptation to climate change is being prepared as part of the newly approved project "Climate Resilient Bratislava - Pilot Projects for Decarbonisation, Energy Efficiency of Buildings and Sustainable Rainwater Management in the Urban Environment" supported by an EEA-Norway grant to be implemented until 2023. According to the Interim report for 2017-2018,[[15]](#footnote-15) however, within the Bratislava project, pilot application of measures in the field of rainfall retention in urban environments have been carried out (supported by the EEA and Norway grant in the period 2014-2017) and the capital city of the Slovak Republic Bratislava carried out tree planting on the Main Square, green revitalization on Franciscan Square, and created a vegetation roof on the ARCHA Seniors' house.

In addition, it is also common to conduct awareness raising on the risks of heat waves and recommendations for seniors via various communication channels (TV, radio, social media).

Opportunities for vulnerable groups to engage in policy-making:

The analysis of the access of minorities to participatory processes (also in environmental matters) was carried out by the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Development of Civil Society.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Based on their analyzes, the biggest challenge for participation at the municipality level is to increase professional capacity and motivation to invest in participatory processes on the one hand and public motivation to engage on the other, given that participatory processes or adaptation-mitigation policies are too complicated, abstract, without a direct positive impact (this needs to be explained, for example, in the area of ​​energy supply, less polluted air, etc.). Although it is possible to identify examples of good practice where participatory processes were directly initiated by NGOs or entered by NGOs, this practice is not widespread. Routine participatory processes are not accessible to people with disabilities, people having a different mother tongue, or people who do not have sufficient civic competences. Active participation is thus still a right that the majority with secondary and higher education has the opportunity to realize.

1. **Please include examples and good practices that highlight international and multilateral cooperation and approaches that are implemented through close consultation with and active involvement of people in vulnerable situations.**

N/A

1. **Please provide any additional information you believe would be useful to support climate action that promotes the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations.**

N/A

1. Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute, available at: http://www.shmu.sk/sk/?page=1064. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Datacube, the Index of material deprivation according to the selected age categories and gender, 2019, available at: <http://datacube.statistics.sk/#!/view/sk/VBD_SLOVSTAT/ps2029rs/v_ps2029rs_00_00_00_sk>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Greener Slovakia, Strategy of the Environmental Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Greener Slovakia, Strategy of the Environmental Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030, p. 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, ‘the Low-Carbon Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 with a View to 2050’, available in English at: https://www.minzp.sk/files/oblasti/politika-zmeny-klimy/low-carbon-development-strategy-slovak-republic.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. National Environmental and Health Action Plan of the Slovak Republic V. (2020-2030), available in Slovak language at: https://www.uvzsr.sk/docs/info/zp/nehap/NEHAP\_V.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ministry of environment of the Slovak Republic, Adaptation strategy of the Slovak Republic to climate change, available in Slovak language at: https://www.minzp.sk/files/odbor-politiky-zmeny-klimy/strategia-adaptacie-sr-zmenu-klimy-aktualizacia.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Public Health Authority of the Slovak Republic, ‘The current list of exemptions in the Slovak Republic to usage of water which does not fulfil the markers of quality drinking water’, available at: https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&id=3672%3Aaktualny-zoznam-vynimiek-v-slovenskej-republike-na-pouitie-vody-ktora-nespa-limity-ukazovateov-kvality-pitnej-vody&catid=157%3Aostatne&Itemid=65 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
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10. Pecho, J.; Výberčí, D. The effects of the 1996–2012 summer heat events on human mortality in Slovakia. IN: Moravian Geographical reports 3, s. 62. https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/mgr/23/3/article-p58.xml?language=en. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. ITMS, Details of the Project Facts and knowledge based support of decision making and strategic planning in the field of adaptation of agriculture on climate change, available at: <https://www.itms2014.sk/projekt?id=dc565117-a52e-4df4-b386-581ccdec73b2>. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Populair, ‘We are improving the quality of air in the Slovak Republic’, available at: <https://www.populair.sk/sk> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Adaptability strategy of the town Trenčín to climate change, published September 2019, available in Slovak language at: https://trencin.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Stratégia-adaptability-mesta-Trenč%C3%ADn-na-klimatickú-zmenu-.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Action plan for adaptation to adverse impacts of climate change in the territory of the capital city of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, for the period of 2017-2020, available at: https://bratislava.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/Dokumenty/Stránky/Zmena%20kl%C3%ADmy%20-%20Priebežná%20sprava%202017-18 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Action plan for adaptation to adverse impacts of climate change on the territory of the capital city of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava 2017-2020, Interim report for the period 2017-2018, available in Slovak language at: https://bratislava.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/Dokumenty/Stránky/Zmena%20kl%C3%ADmy%20-%20Priebežná%20sprava%202017-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Babiaková, K., Figuli, I. and Vozár, I., ‘Analysis of the existing participatory tools in the Slovak legislative framework on all levels of public administration’, 2018, available at: https://www.minv.sk/swift\_data/source/rozvoj\_obcianskej\_spolocnosti/participacia/vystupy\_np\_parti/Analyza%20existujucich%20participativnych%20nastrojov%20v%20slovenskom%20legislativnom%20ramci.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-16)